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MARION FAY.

A NOVEL.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "FRAMLEY PARSONAGE," "GREEN FARM,"
"THE WAY WE LIVE NOW," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

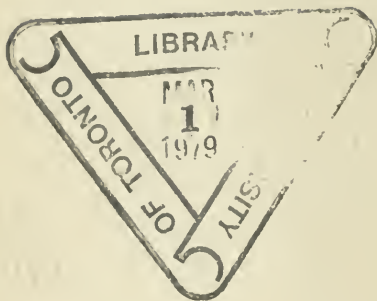
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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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MARION FAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE MARQUIS OF KINGSBURY.

WHEN Mr. Lionel Trafford went into Parliament for the Borough of Wednesbury as an advanced Radical, it nearly broke the heart of his uncle, the old Marquis of Kingsbury. Among Tories of his day the Marquis had been hyper-Tory,—as were his friends, the Duke of Newcastle, who thought that a man should be allowed to do what he liked with his own, and the Marquis of Londonderry, who, when some such falling-off in the family politics came near him, spoke with indignation of the family treasure which had been expended in defending the family seat. Wednesbury had never been the Marquis's own; but his nephew was so in a peculiar sense. His nephew was necessarily his heir,—the future Marquis,—and the old Marquis never again, politically, held up his head. He was an old man when this occurred, and luckily for him he did not live to see the worse things which came afterwards.

The Member for Wednesbury became Marquis and owner of the large family property, but still he kept his politics. He was a Radical Marquis, wedded to all popular measures, not ashamed of his Charter days,

and still clamorous for further Parliamentary reform, although it was regularly noted in *Dod* that the Marquis of Kingsbury was supposed to have strong influence in the Borough of Edgware. It was so strong that both he and his uncle had put in whom they pleased. His uncle had declined to put him in because of his renegade theories, but he revenged himself by giving the seat to a glib-mouthed tailor, who, to tell the truth, had not done much credit to his choice.

But it came to pass that the shade of his uncle was avenged, if it can be supposed that such feelings will affect the eternal rest of a dead Marquis. There grew up a young Lord Hampstead, the son and heir of the Radical Marquis, promising in intelligence and satisfactory in externals, but very difficult to deal with as to the use of his thoughts. They could not keep him at Harrow or at Oxford, because he not only rejected, but would talk openly against, Christian doctrines; a religious boy, but determined not to believe in revealed mysteries. And at twenty-one he declared himself a Republican,—explaining thereby that he disapproved altogether of hereditary honours. He was quite as bad to this Marquis as had been this Marquis to the other. The tailor kept his seat because Lord Hampstead would not even condescend to sit for the family borough. He explained to his father that he had doubts about a Parliament of which one section was hereditary, but was sure that at present he was too young for it. There must surely have been gratification in this to the shade of the departed Marquis.

But there was worse than this,—infinitely worse. Lord Hampstead formed a close friendship with a young man, five years older than himself, who was but a clerk in the Post Office. In George Roden, as a man and a com-

panion, there was no special fault to be found. There may be those who think that a Marquis's heir should look for his most intimate friend in a somewhat higher scale of social rank, and that he would more probably serve the purposes of his future life by associating with his equals;—that like to like in friendship is advantageous. The Marquis, his father, certainly thought so in spite of his Radicalism. But he might have been pardoned on the score of Roden's general good gifts,—might have been pardoned even though it were true, as supposed, that to Roden's strong convictions Lord Hampstead owed much of the ultra virus of his political convictions,—might have been pardoned had not there been worse again. At Hendon Hall, the Marquis's lovely suburban seat, the Post Office clerk was made acquainted with Lady Frances Trafford, and they became lovers.

The radicalism of a Marquis is apt to be tainted by special considerations in regard to his own family. This Marquis, though he had his exoteric politics, had his esoteric feelings. With him, Liberal as he was, his own blood possessed a peculiar ichor. Though it might be well that men in the mass should be as nearly equal as possible, yet, looking at the state of possibilities and realities as existent, it was clear to him that a Marquis of Kingsbury had been placed on a pedestal. It might be that the state of things was matter for regret. In his grander moments he was certain that it was so. Why should there be a ploughboy unable to open his mouth because of his infirmity, and a Marquis with his own voice very resonant in the House of Lords, and a deputy voice dependent on him in the House of Commons? He had said so very frequently before his son, not knowing then what might be the effect of his own teaching. There had been a certain pride in his heart as he taught these

lessons, wrong though it might be that there should be a Marquis and a ploughboy so far reversed by the injustice of Fate. There had been a comfort to him in feeling that Fate had made him the Marquis, and had made some one else the ploughboy. He knew what it was to be a Marquis down to the last inch of aristocratic admeasurement. He would fain that his children should have understood this also. But his lesson had gone deeper than he had intended, and great grief had come of it.

The Marquis had been first married to a lady altogether unconnected with noble blood, but whose father had held a position of remarkable ascendancy in the House of Commons. He had never been a Cabinet Minister, because he had persisted in thinking that he could better serve his country by independence. He had been possessed of wealth, and had filled a great place in the social world. In marrying the only daughter of this gentleman the Marquis of Kingsbury had indulged his peculiar taste in regard to Liberalism, and was at the same time held not to have derogated from his rank. She had been a woman of great beauty and of many intellectual gifts,—thoroughly imbued with her father's views, but altogether free from feminine pedantry and that ambition which begrudges to men the rewards of male labour. Had she lived, Lady Frances might probably not have fallen in with the Post Office clerk; nevertheless, had she lived, she would have known the Post Office clerk to be a worthy gentleman.

But she had died when her son was about sixteen and her daughter no more than fifteen. Two years afterwards our Marquis had gone among the dukes, and had found for himself another wife. Perhaps the freshness and edge of his political convictions had been blunted

by that gradual sinking down among the great peers in general which was natural to his advanced years. A man who has spouted at twenty-five becomes tired of spouting at fifty, if nothing special has come from his spouting. He had been glad when he married Lady Clara Mountressor to think that circumstances as they had occurred at the last election would not make it necessary for him to deliver up the borough to the tailor on any further occasion. The tailor had been drunk at the hustings, and he ventured to hope that before six months were over Lord Hampstead would have so far rectified his frontiers as to be able to take a seat in the House of Commons.

Then very quickly there were born three little flaxen-haired boys,—who became at least flaxen-haired as they emerged from their cradles,—Lord Frederic, Lord Augustus, and Lord Gregory. That they must be brought up with ideas becoming the scions of a noble House there could be no doubt. Their mother was every inch a duke's daughter. But, alas, not one of them was likely to become Marquis of Kingsbury. Though born so absolutely in the purple they were but younger sons. This was a silent sorrow;—but when their half sister Lady Frances told their mother openly that she had plighted her troth to the Post Office clerk, that was a sorrow which did not admit of silence.

When Lord Hampstead had asked permission to bring his friend to the house there seemed to be no valid reason for refusing him. Low as he had descended amidst the depths of disreputable opinion, it was not supposed that even he would countenance anything so horrible as this. And was there not ground for security in the reticence and dignity of Lady Frances herself? The idea never presented itself to the Marchioness. When she heard

that the Post Office clerk was coming she was naturally disgusted. All Lord Hampstead's ideas, doings, and ways were disgusting to her. She was a woman full of high-bred courtesy, and had always been gracious to her son-in-law's friends,—but it had been with a cold grace. Her heart rejected them thoroughly,—as she did him, and, to tell the truth, Lady Frances also. Lady Frances had all her mother's dignity, all her mother's tranquil manner, but something more than her mother's advanced opinions. She, too, had her ideas that the world should gradually be taught to dispense with the distances which separate the dukes and the ploughboys,—gradually, but still with a progressive motion, always tending in that direction. This to her stepmother was disgusting.

The Post Office clerk had never before been received at Hendon Hall, though he had been introduced in London by Lord Hampstead to his sister. The Post Office clerk had indeed abstained from coming, having urged his own feelings with his friend as to certain unfitnesses. "A Marquis is as absurd to me as to you," he had said to Lord Hampstead, "but while there are Marquises they should be indulged,—particularly Marchionesses. An over-delicate skin is a nuisance; but if skins have been so trained as not to bear the free air, veils must be allowed for their protection. The object should be to train the skin, not to punish it abruptly. An unfortunate Sybarite Marchioness ought to have her rose leaves. Now I am not a rose leaf." And so he had stayed away.

But the argument had been carried on between the friends, and the noble heir had at last prevailed. George Roden was not a rose leaf, but he was found at Hendon to have flowers of beautiful hues and with a sweet scent. Had he not been known to be a Post Office clerk,—could

the Marchioness have been allowed to judge of him simply from his personal appearance,—he might have been taken to be as fine a rose leaf as any. He was a tall, fair, strongly-built young man, with short light hair, pleasant grey eyes, an aquiline nose, and small mouth. In his gait and form and face nothing was discernibly more appropriate to Post Office clerks than to the nobility at large. But he was a clerk, and he himself, as he himself declared, knew nothing of his own family,—remembered no relation but his mother.

It had come to pass that the house at Hendon had become specially the residence of Lord Hampstead, who would neither have lodgings of his own in London or make part of the family when it occupied Kingsbury House in Park Lane. He would sometimes go abroad, would sometimes appear for a week or two at Trafford Park, the grand seat in Yorkshire. But he preferred the place, half town half country, in the neighbourhood of London, and here George Roden came frequently backwards and forwards after the ice had been broken by a first visit. Sometimes the Marquis would be there, and with him his daughter,—rarely the Marchioness. Then came the time when Lady Frances declared boldly to her stepmother that she had pledged her troth to the Post Office clerk. That happened in June, when Parliament was sitting, and when the flowers at Hendon were at their best. The Marchioness came there for a day or two, and the Post Office clerk on that morning had left the house for his office work, not purposing to come back. Some words had been said which had caused annoyance, and he did not intend to return. When he had been gone about an hour Lady Frances revealed the truth.

Her brother at that time was two-and-twenty. She was a year younger. The clerk might perhaps be six

years older than the young lady. Had he only been the eldest son of a Marquis, or Earl, or Viscount; had he been but an embryo Baron, he might have done very well. He was a well-spoken youth, yet with a certain modesty, such a one as might easily take the eye of a wished-for though ever so noble a mother-in-law. The little lords had learned to play with him, and it had come about that he was at his ease in the house. The very servants had seemed to forget that he was no more than a clerk, and that he went off by railway into town every morning that he might earn ten shillings by sitting for six hours at his desk. Even the Marchioness had almost trained herself to like him,—as one of those excrescences which are sometimes to be found in noble families, some governess, some chaplain or private secretary, whom chance or merit has elevated in the house, and who thus becomes a trusted friend. Then by chance she heard the name “Frances” without the prefix “Lady,” and said a word in haughty anger. The Post Office clerk packed up his portmanteau, and Lady Frances told her story.

Lord Hampstead’s name was John. He was the Honourable John Trafford, called by courtesy Earl of Hampstead. To the world at large he was Lord Hampstead,—to his friends in general he was Hampstead; to his stepmother he was especially Hampstead,—as would have been her own eldest son the moment he was born had he been born to such good luck. To his father he had become Hampstead lately. In early days there had been some secret family agreement that in spite of conventionalities he should be John among them. The Marquis had latterly suggested that increasing years made this foolish; but the son himself attributed the change to step-maternal influences. But still he was John

to his sister, and John to some half-dozen sympathising friends,—and among others to the Post Office clerk.

“He has not said a word to me,” the sister replied when she was taxed by her brother with seeming partiality for their young visitor.

“But he will?”

“No girl will ever admit as much as that, John.”

“But if he should?”

“No girl will have an answer ready for such a suggestion.”

“I know he will.”

“If so, and if you have wishes to express, you should speak to him.”

All this made the matter quite clear to her brother. A girl such as was his sister would not so receive a brother's notice as to a proposed overture of love from a Post Office clerk, unless she had brought herself to look at the possibility without abhorrence.

“Would it go against the grain with you, John?” This was what the clerk said when he was interrogated by his friend.

“There would be difficulties.”

“Very great difficulties,—difficulties even with you.”

“I did not say so.”

“They would come naturally. The last thing that a man can abandon of his social idolatries is the sanctity of the women belonging to him.”

“God forbid that I should give up anything of the sanctity of my sister.”

“No; but the idolatry attached to it! It is as well that even a nobleman's daughter should be married if she can find a nobleman or such like to her taste. There is no breach of sanctity in the love,—but so great a wound to the idolatry in the man! Things have not

changed so quickly that even you should be free from the feeling. Three hundred years ago, if the man could not be despatched out of the country or to the other world, the girl at least would be locked up. Three hundred years hence the girl and the man will stand together on their own merits. Just in this period of transition it is very hard for such a one as you to free himself altogether from the old trammels."

"I make the endeavour."

"Most bravely. But, my dear fellow, let this individual thing stand separately, away from politics and abstract ideas. I mean to ask your sister whether I can have her heart, and, as far as her will goes, her hand. If you are displeased I suppose we shall have to part—for a time. Let theories run ever so high, Love will be stronger than them all." Lord Hampstead at this moment gave no assurance of his good will; but when it came to pass that his sister had given her assurance, then he ranged himself on the side of his friend the clerk.

So it came to pass that there was great trouble in the household of the Marquis of Kingsbury. The family went abroad before the end of July, on account of the health of the children. So said the *Morning Post*. Anxious friends inquired in vain what could have befallen those flaxen-haired young Herculesees. Why was it necessary that they should be taken to the Saxon Alps when the beauties and comforts of Trafford Park were so much nearer and so superior? Lady Frances was taken with them, and there were one or two noble intimates among the world of fashion who heard some passing whisper of the truth. When passing whispers creep into the world of fashion they are heard far and wide.

CHAPTER II.

LORD HAMPSTEAD.

LORD HAMPSTEAD, though he would not go into Parliament or belong to any London Club, or walk about the streets with a chimney-pot hat, or perform any of his public functions as a young nobleman should do, had, nevertheless, his own amusements and his own extravagances. In the matter of money he was placed outside his father's liberality,—who was himself inclined to be liberal enough,—by the fact that he had inherited a considerable portion of his maternal grandfather's fortune. It might almost be said truly of him that money was no object to him. It was not that he did not often talk about money and think about money. He was very prone to do so, saying that money was the most important factor in the world's justices and injustices. But he was so fortunately circumstanced as to be able to leave money out of his own personal consideration, never being driven by the want of it to deny himself anything, or tempted by a superabundance to expenditure which did not otherwise approve itself to him. To give 10s. or 20s. a bottle for wine because somebody pretended that it was very fine, or £300 for a horse when one at a £100 would do his work for him, was altogether below his philosophy. By his father's lodge gate there ran an omnibus up to town which he would often use, saying that an omnibus with company was better than a private carriage with none. He was wont to be angry with himself in that he employed a fashionable tailor, declaring that he incurred unnecessary expense merely to save himself the trouble of going elsewhere. In this, however, it may be thought that there

was something of pretence, as he was no doubt conscious of good looks, and aware probably that a skilful tailor might add a grace.

In his amusements he affected two which are especially expensive. He kept a yacht, in which he was accustomed to absent himself in the summer and autumn, and he had a small hunting establishment in Northamptonshire. Of the former little need be said here, as he spent his time on board much alone, or with friends with whom we need not follow him; but it may be said that everything about the *Free Trader* was done well,—for such was the name of the vessel. Though he did not pay 10s. a bottle for his wine, he paid the best price for sails and cordage, and hired a competent skipper to look after himself and his boat. His hunting was done very much in the same way,—unless it be that in his yachting he was given to be tranquil, and in his hunting he was very fond of hard riding. At Gorse Hall, as his cottage was called, he had all comforts, we may perhaps say much of luxury, around him. It was indeed hardly more than a cottage, having been an old farm-house, and lately converted to its present purpose. There were no noble surroundings, no stately hall, no marble staircases, no costly salon. You entered by a passage which deserved no auguster name, on the right of which was the dining-room; on the left a larger chamber, always called the drawing-room because of the fashion of the name. Beyond that was a smaller retreat in which the owner kept his books. Leading up from the end of the passage there was a steep staircase, a remnant of the old farm-house, and above them five bed-rooms, so that his lordship was limited to the number of four guests. Behind this was the kitchen and the servants' rooms—sufficient, but not more than sufficient, for such a house. Here

our young democrat kept half-a-dozen horses, all of them—as men around were used to declare—fit to go, although they were said to have been bought at not more than £100 each. It was supposed to be a crotchet on the part of Lord Hampstead to assert that cheap things were as good as dear, and there were some who believed that he did in truth care as much for his horses as other people. It was certainly a fact that he never would have but one out in a day, and he was wont to declare that Smith took out his second horse chiefly that Jones might know that he did so. Down here, at Gorse Hall, the Post Office clerk had often been received as a visitor,—but not at Gorse Hall had he ever seen Lady Frances.

This lord had peculiar ideas about hunting, in reference to sport in general. It was supposed of him, and supposed truly, that no young man in England was more devotedly attached to fox-hunting than he,—and that in want of a fox he would ride after a stag, and in want of a stag after a drag. If everything else failed he would go home across the country, any friend accompanying him, or else alone. Nevertheless, he entertained a vehement hostility against all other sports.

Of racing he declared that it had become simply a way of making money, and of all ways the least profitable to the world and the most disreputable. He was never seen on a racecourse. But his enemies declared of him, that though he loved riding he was no judge of an animal's pace, and that he was afraid to bet lest he should lose his money.

Against shooting he was still louder. If there was in his country any tradition, any custom, any law hateful to him, it was such as had reference to the preservation of game. The preservation of a fox, he said, stood

on a perfectly different basis. The fox was not preserved by law, and when preserved was used for the advantage of all who chose to be present at the amusement. One man in one day would shoot fifty pheasants which had eaten up the food of half-a-dozen human beings. One fox afforded in one day amusement to two hundred sportsmen, and was—or more generally was not—killed during the performance. And the fox during his beneficial life had eaten no corn, nor for the most part geese,—but chiefly rats and such like. What infinitesimal sum had the fox cost the country for every man who rushed after him? Then, what had been the cost of all those pheasants which one shooting cormorant crammed into his huge bag during one day's greedy sport?

But it was the public nature of the one amusement and the thoroughly private nature of the other which chiefly affected him. In the hunting-field the farmer's son, if he had a pony, or the butcher-boy out of the town, could come and take his part; and if the butcher-boy could go ahead and keep his place while the man with a red coat and pink boots and with two horses fell behind, the butcher-boy would have the best of it, and incur the displeasure of no one. And the laws, too, by which hunting is governed, if there be laws, are thoroughly democratic in their nature. They are not, he said, made by any Parliament, but are simply assented to on behalf of the common need. It was simply in compliance with opinion that the lands of all men are open to be ridden over by the men of the hunt. In compliance with opinion foxes are preserved. In compliance with opinion coverts are drawn by this or the other pack of hounds. The Legislature had not stepped in to defile the statute book by bye-laws made in favour of the amusements of

the rich. If injury were done, the ordinary laws of the country were open to the injured party. Anything in hunting that had grown to be beyond the reach of the law had become so by the force of popular opinion.

All of this was reversed in shooting, from any participation in which the poor were debarred by enactments made solely on behalf of the rich. Four or five men in a couple of days would offer up hecatombs of slaughtered animals, in doing which they could only justify themselves by the fact that they were acting as poultry-butchers for the supply of the markets of the country. There was no excitement in it,—simply the firing off of many guns with a rapidity which altogether prevents that competition which is essential to the enjoyment of sport. Then our noble Republican would quote *Teufelsdrückh* and the memorable epitaph of the partridge-slayer. But it was on the popular and unpopular elements of the two sports that he would most strongly dilate, and on the iniquity of the game-laws as applying to the more aristocratic of the two. It was, however, asserted by the sporting world at large that Hampstead could not hit a haystack.

As to fishing, he was almost equally violent, grounding his objection on the tedium and cruelty incident to the pursuit. The first was only a matter of taste, he would allow. If a man could content himself and be happy with an average of one fish to every three days' fishing, that was the man's affair. He could only think that in such case the man himself must be as cold-blooded as the fish which he so seldom succeeded in catching. As to the cruelty, he thought there could be no doubt. When he heard that bishops and ladies delighted themselves in hauling an unfortunate animal about by the gills for more than an hour at a stretch, he

was inclined to regret the past piety of the Church and the past tenderness of the sex. When he spoke in this way the cruelty of fox-hunting was of course thrown in his teeth. Did not the poor hunted quadrupeds, when followed hither and thither by a pack of fox-hounds, endure torments as sharp and as prolonged as those inflicted on the fish? In answer to this Lord Hampstead was eloquent and argumentative. As far as we could judge from Nature the condition of the two animals during the process was very different. The salmon with the hook in its throat was in a position certainly not intended by Nature. The fox, using all its gifts to avoid an enemy, was employed exactly as Nature had enjoined. It would be as just to compare a human being impaled alive on a stake with another overburdened with his world's task. The overburdened man might stumble and fall, and so perish. Things would have been hard to him. But not, therefore, could you compare his sufferings with the excruciating agonies of the poor wretch who had been left to linger and starve with an iron rod through his vitals. This argument was thought to be crafty rather than cunning by those who were fond of fishing. But he had another on which, when he had blown off the steam of his eloquence by his sensational description of a salmon impaled by a bishop, he could depend with greater confidence. He would grant,—for the moment, though he was by no means sure of the fact,—but for the moment he would grant that the fox did not enjoy the hunt. Let it be acknowledged—for the sake of the argument—that he was tortured by the hounds rather than elated by the triumphant success of his own manœuvres. Lord Hampstead “ventured to say,”—this he would put forward in the rationalistic tone with which he was wont to prove the absurdity of

hereditary honours,—“that in the infliction of all pain the question as to cruelty or no cruelty was one of relative value.” Was it “tanti?” Who can doubt that for a certain maximum of good a certain minimum of suffering may be inflicted without slur to humanity? In hunting, one fox was made to finish his triumphant career, perhaps prematurely, for the advantage of two hundred sportsmen. “Ah, but only for their amusement!” would interpose some humanitarian averse equally to fishing and to hunting. Then his lordship would arise indignantly and would ask his opponent, whether what he called amusement was not as beneficial, as essential, as necessary to the world as even such material good things as bread and meat. Was poetry less valuable than the multiplication table? Man could exist no doubt without fox-hunting. So he could without butter, without wine, or other so-called necessaries;—without ermine tippets, for instance, the original God-invested wearer of which had been doomed to lingering starvation and death when trapped amidst the snow, in order that one lady might be made fine by the agonies of a dozen little furry sufferers. It was all a case of “tanti,” he said, and he said that the fox who had saved himself half-a-dozen times and then died nobly on behalf of those who had been instrumental in preserving an existence for him, ought not to complain of the lot which Fate had provided for him among the animals of the earth. It was said, however, in reference to this comparison between fishing and fox-hunting, that Lord Hampstead was altogether deficient in that skill and patience which is necessary for the landing of a salmon.

But men, though they laughed at him, still they liked him. He was good humoured and kindly hearted. He was liberal in more than his politics. He had, too,

a knack of laughing at himself, and his own peculiarities, which went far to redeem them. That a young Earl, an embryo Marquis, the heir of such a house as that of Trafford, should preach a political doctrine which those who heard ignorantly called Communistic, was very dreadful; but the horror of it was mitigated when he declared that no doubt as he got old he should turn Tory like any other Radical. In this there seemed to be a covert allusion to his father. And then they could perceive that his "Communistic" principles did not prevent him from having a good eye to the value of land. He knew what he was about, as an owner of property should do, and certainly rode to hounds as well as any one of the boys of the period.

When the idea first presented itself to him that his sister was on the way to fall in love with George Roden, it has to be acknowledged that he was displeased. It had not occurred to him that this peculiar breach would be made on the protected sanctity of his own family. When Roden had spoken to him of this sanctity as one of the "social idolatries," he had not quite been able to contradict him. He had wished to do so both in defence of his own consistency, and also, if it were possible, so as to maintain the sanctity. The "divinity" which "does hedge a king," had been to him no more than a social idolatry. The special respect in which dukes and such like were held was the same. The judge's ermine and the bishop's apron were idolatries. Any outward honour, not earned by the deeds or words of him so honoured, but coming from birth, wealth, or from the doings of another, was an idolatry. Carrying on his arguments, he could not admit the same thing in reference to his sister;—or rather, he would have to admit it if he could not make another plea in defence

of the sanctity. His sister was very holy to him;—but that should be because of her nearness to him, because of her sweetness, because of her own gifts, because as her brother he was bound to be her especial knight till she should have chosen some other special knight for herself. But it should not be because she was the daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of dukes and marquises. It should not be because she was Lady Frances Trafford. Had he himself been a Post Office clerk, then would not this chosen friend have been fit to love her? There were unfitnesses, no doubt, very common in this world, which should make the very idea of love impossible to a woman,—unfitness of character, of habits, of feelings, of education, unfitnesses as to inward personal nobility. He could not say that there were any such which ought to separate his sister and his friend. If it was to be that this sweet sister should some day give her heart to a lover, why not to George Roden as well as to another? There were no such unfitnesses as those of which he would have thought in dealing with the lives of some other girl and some other young man.

And yet he was, if not displeased, at any rate dissatisfied. There was something which grated against either his taste, or his judgment,—or perhaps his prejudices. He endeavoured to inquire into himself fairly on this matter, and feared that he was yet the victim of the prejudices of his order. He was wounded in his pride to think that his sister should make herself equal to a clerk in the Post Office. Though he had often endeavoured, only too successfully, to make her understand how little she had in truth received from her high birth, yet he felt that she had received something which should have made the proposal of such a marriage dis-

tasteful to her. A man cannot rid himself of a prejudice because he knows or believes it to be a prejudice. That the two, if they continued to wish it, must become man and wife he acknowledged to himself;—but he could not bring himself not to be sorry that it should be so.

There were some words on the subject between himself and his father before the Marquis went abroad with his family, which, though they did not reconcile him to the match, lessened the dissatisfaction. His father was angry with him, throwing the blame of this untoward affair on his head, and he was always prone to resent censure thrown by any of his family on his own peculiar tenets. Thus it came to pass that in defending himself he was driven to defend his sister also. The Marquis had not been at Hendon when the revelation was first made, but had heard it in the course of the day from his wife. His Radical tendencies had done very little towards reconciling him to such a proposal. He had never brought his theories home into his own personalities. To be a Radical peer in the House of Lords, and to have sent a Radical tailor to the House of Commons, had been enough, if not too much, to satisfy his own political ideas. To himself and to his valet, to all those immediately touching himself, he had always been the Marquis of Kingsbury. And so also, in his inner heart, the Marchioness was the Marchioness, and Lady Frances Lady Frances. He had never gone through any process of realizing his convictions as his son had done. "Hampstead," he said, "can this possibly be true what your mother has told me?" This took place at the house in Park Lane, to which the Marquis had summoned his son.

"Do you mean about Frances and George Roden?"

"Of course I mean that."

"I supposed you did, sir. I imagined that when you sent for me it was in regard to them. No doubt it is true."

"What is true? You speak as though you absolutely approved it."

"Then my voice has belied me, for I disapprove of it."

"You feel, I hope, how utterly impossible it is."

"Not that."

"Not that?"

"I cannot say that I think it to be impossible,—or even improbable. Knowing the two, as I do, I feel the probability to be on their side."

"That they—should be married?"

"That is what they intend. I never knew either of them to mean anything which did not sooner or later get itself accomplished."

"You'll have to learn it on this occasion. How on earth can it have been brought about?" Lord Hampstead shrugged his shoulders. "Somebody has been very much to blame."

"You mean me, sir?"

"Somebody has been very much to blame."

"Of course, you mean me. I cannot take any blame in the matter. In introducing George Roden to you, and to my mother, and to Frances, I brought you to the knowledge of a highly-educated and extremely well-mannered young man."

"Good God!"

"I did to my friend what every young man, I suppose, does to his. I should be ashamed of myself to associate with any one who was not a proper guest for my father's table. One does not calculate before that a young man and a young woman shall fall in love with each other."

"You see what has happened."

"It was extremely natural, no doubt,—though I had not anticipated it. As I told you, I am very sorry. It will cause many heartburns, and some unhappiness."

"Unhappiness! I should think so. I must go away,—in the middle of the Session."

"It will be worse for her, poor girl."

"It will be very bad for her," said the Marquis, speaking as though his mind were quite made up on that matter.

"But nobody, as far as I can see, has done anything wrong," continued Lord Hampstead. "When two young people get together whose tastes are similar, and opinions,—whose educations and habits of thought have been the same——"

"Habits the same!"

"Habits of thought, I said, sir."

"You would talk the hind legs off a dog," said the Marquis, bouncing out of the room. It was not unusual with him, in the absolute privacy of his own circle, to revert to language which he would have felt to be unbecoming to him as Marquis of Kingsbury among ordinary people.

CHAPTER III.

THE MARCHIONESS.

THOUGH the departure of the Marquis was much hurried, there were other meetings between Hampstead and the family before the flitting was actually made.

"No doubt I will. I am quite with you there," the son said to the father, who had desired him to explain to the young man the impossibility of such a marriage. "I think it would be a misfortune to them both, which

should be avoided,—if they can get over their present feelings."

"Feelings!"

"I suppose there are such feelings, sir?"

"Of course he is looking for position—and money."

"Not in the least. That might probably be the idea with some young nobleman who would wish to marry into his own class, and to improve his fortune at the same time. With such a one that would be fair enough. He would give and take. With George that would not be honest;—nor would such accusation be true. The position, as you call it, he would feel to be burdensome. As to money, he does not know whether Frances has a shilling or not."

"Not a shilling,—unless I give it to her."

"He would not think of such a matter."

"Then he must be a very imprudent young man, and unfit to have a wife at all."

"I cannot admit that—but suppose he is?"

"And yet you think——?"

"I think, sir, that it is unfortunate. I have said so ever since I first heard it. I shall tell him exactly what I think. You will have Frances with you, and will of course express your own opinion."

The Marquis was far from satisfied with his son, but did not dare to go on further with the argument. In all such discussions he was wont to feel that his son was "talking the hind legs off a dog." His own ideas on concrete points were clear enough to him,—as this present idea that his daughter, Lady Frances Trafford, would outrage all propriety, all fitness, all decency, if she were to give herself in marriage to George Roden, the Post Office clerk. But words were not plenty with him,—or, when plenty, not efficacious,—and he was

prone to feel, when beaten in argument, that his opponent was taking an unfair advantage. Thus it was that he often thought, and sometimes said, that those who oppressed him with words would "talk the hind legs off a dog."

The Marchioness also expressed her opinion to Hampstead. She was a lady stronger than her husband;—stronger in this, that she never allowed herself to be worsted in any encounter. If words would not serve her occasion at the moment, her countenance would do so,—and if not that, her absence. She could be very eloquent with silence, and strike an adversary dumb by the way in which she would leave a room. She was a tall, handsome woman, with a sublime gait.—"Vera incessu patuit Dea." She had heard, if not the words, then some translation of the words, and had taken them to heart, and borne them with her as her secret motto. To be every inch an aristocrat, in look as in thought, was the object of her life. That such was her highest duty was quite fixed in her mind. It had pleased God to make her a Marchioness,—and should she derogate from God's wish? It had been her one misfortune that God should not also have made her the mother of a future Marquis. Her face, though handsome, was quite impassive, showing nothing of her sorrows or her joys; and her voice was equally under control. No one had ever imagined, not even her husband, that she felt acutely that one blow of fortune. Though Hampstead's politics had been to her abominable, treasonable, blasphemous, she treated him with an extreme courtesy. If there were anything that he wished about the house she would have it done for him. She would endeavour to interest herself about his hunting. And she would pay him a great respect,—to him most onerous,—as being second in all things

to the Marquis. Though a Republican blasphemous rebel,—so she thought of him,—he was second to the Marquis. She would fain have taught her little boys to respect him,—as the future head of the family, had he not been so accustomed to romp with them, to pull them out of their little beds, and toss them about in their night-shirts, that they loved him much too well for respect. It was in vain that their mother strove to teach them to call him Hampstead.

Lady Frances had never been specially in her way, but to Lady Frances the stepmother had been perhaps harder than to the stepson, of whose presence as an absolute block to her ambition she was well aware. Lady Frances had no claim to a respect higher than that which was due to her own children. Primogeniture had done nothing for her. She was a Marquis's daughter, but her mother had been only the offspring of a commoner. There was perhaps something of conscience in her feelings towards the two. As Lord Hampstead was undoubtedly in her way, it occurred to her to think that she should not on that account be inimical to him. Lady Frances was not in her way,—and therefore was open to depreciation and dislike without wounds to her conscience; and then, though Hampstead was abominable because of his Republicanism, his implied treason, and blasphemy, yet he was entitled to some excuse as being a man. These things were abominable no doubt in him, but more pardonably abominable than they would be in a woman. Lady Frances had never declared herself to be a Republican or a disbeliever, much less a rebel,—as, indeed, had neither Lord Hampstead. In the presence of her stepmother she was generally silent on matters of political or religious interest. But she was supposed to sympathise with her brother, and was known

to be far from properly alive to aristocratic interests. There was never quarrelling between the two, but there was a lack of that friendship which may subsist between a stepmother of thirty-eight and a stepdaughter of twenty-one. Lady Frances was tall and slender, with quiet speaking features, dark in colour, with blue eyes, and hair nearly black. In appearance she was the very opposite of her stepmother, moving quickly and achieving grace as she did so, without a thought, by the natural beauty of her motions. The dignity was there, but without a thought given to it. Not even did the little lords, her brothers, chuck their books and toys about with less idea of demeanour. But the Marchioness never arranged a scarf or buttoned a glove without feeling that it was her duty to button her glove and arrange her scarf as became the Marchioness of Kingsbury.

The stepmother wished no evil to Lady Frances,—only that she should be married properly and taken out of the way. Any stupid Earl or mercurial Viscount would have done, so long as the blood and the money had been there. Lady Frances had been felt to be dangerous, and the hope was that the danger might be got rid of by a proper marriage. But not by such a marriage as this!

When that accidental calling of the name was first heard and the following avowal made, the Marchioness declared her immediate feelings by a look. It was so that Arthur may have looked when he first heard that his Queen was sinful,—so that Cæsar must have felt when even Brutus struck him. For though Lady Frances had been known to be blind to her own greatness, still this,—this at any rate was not suspected. “You cannot mean it!” the Marchioness had at last said.

“I certainly mean it, mamma.” Then the Marchioness,

with one hand guarding her raiment, and with the other raised high above her shoulder, in an agony of supplication to those deities who arrange the fates of ducal houses, passed slowly out of the room. It was necessary that she should bethink herself before another word was spoken.

For some time after that very few words passed between her and the sinner. A dead silence best befitted the occasion;—as, when a child soils her best frock, we put her in the corner with a scolding; but when she tells a fib we quell her little soul within her by a terrible quiescence. To be eloquently indignant without a word is within the compass of the thoughtfully stolid. It was thus that Lady Frances was at first treated by her stepmother. She was, however, at once taken up to London, subjected to the louder anger of her father, and made to prepare for the Saxon Alps. At first, indeed, her immediate destiny was not communicated to her. She was to be taken abroad;—and, in so taking her, it was felt to be well to treat her as the policeman does his prisoner, whom he thinks to be the last person who need be informed as to the whereabouts of the prison. It did leak out quickly, because the Marquis had a castle or chateau of his own in Saxony;—but that was only an accident.

The Marchioness still said little on the matter,—unless in what she might say to her husband in the secret recesses of marital discussion; but before she departed she found it expedient to express herself on one occasion to Lord Hampstead. “Hampstead,” she said, “this is a terrible blow that has fallen upon us.”

“I was surprised myself. I do not know that I should call it exactly a blow.”

“Not a blow! But of course you mean that it will come to nothing.”

“What I meant was, that though I regard the proposition as inexpedient——”

“Inexpedient!”

“Yes;—I think it inexpedient certainly; but there is nothing in it that shocks me.”

“Nothing that shocks you!”

“Marriage in itself is a good thing.”

“Hampstead, do not talk to me in that way.”

“But I think it is. If it be good for a young man to marry it must be good for a young woman also. The one makes the other necessary.”

“But not for such as your sister,—and him—together. You are speaking in that way simply to torment me.”

“I can only speak as I think. I do agree that it would be inexpedient. She would to a certain extent lose the countenance of her friends——”

“Altogether!”

“Not altogether,—but to some extent. A certain class of people,—not the best worth knowing,—might be inclined to drop her. However foolish her own friends may be we owe something—even to their folly.”

“Her friends are not foolish,—her proper friends.”

“I quite agree with that; but then so many of them are improper.”

“Hampstead!”

“I am afraid that I don't make myself quite clear. But never mind. It would be inexpedient. It would go against the grain with my father, who ought to be consulted.”

“I should think so.”

“I quite agree with you. A father ought to be con-

sulted, even though a daughter be of age, so as to be enabled by law to do as she likes with herself. And then there would be money discomforts."

"She would not have a shilling."

"Not but what I should think it my duty to put that right if there were any real distress." Here spoke the heir, who was already in possession of much, and upon whom the whole property of the family was entailed. "Nevertheless if I can prevent it,—without quarrelling either with one or the other, without saying a hard word,—I shall do so."

"It will be your bounden duty."

"It is always a man's bounden duty to do what is right. The difficulty is in seeing the way." After this the Marchioness was silent. What she had gained by speaking was very little,—little or nothing. The nature of the opposition he proposed was almost as bad as a sanction, and the reasons he gave for agreeing with her were as hurtful to her feelings as though they had been advanced on the other side. Even the Marquis was not sufficiently struck with horror at the idea that a daughter of his should have condescended to listen to love from a Post Office clerk!

On the day before they started Hampstead was enabled to be alone with his sister for a few minutes. "What an absurdity it is," she said, laughing,—“this running away.”

"It is what you must have expected."

"But not the less absurd. Of course I shall go. Just at the moment I have no alternative; as I should have none if they threatened to lock me up, till I got somebody to take my case in hand. But I am as free to do what I please with myself as is papa."

"He has got money."

"But he is not, therefore, to be a tyrant."

"Yes he is;—over an unmarried daughter who has got none. We cannot but obey those on whom we are dependent."

"What I mean is, that carrying me away can do no good. You don't suppose, John, that I shall give him up after having once brought myself to say the word! It was very difficult to say;—but ten times harder to be unsaid. I am quite determined,—and quite satisfied."

"But they are not."

"As regards my father, I am very sorry. As to mamma, she and I are so different in all our thinking that I know beforehand that whatever I might do would displease her. It cannot be helped. Whether it be good or bad I cannot be made such as she is. She came too late. You will not turn against me, John?"

"I rather think I shall."

"John!"

"I may rather say that I have. I do not think your engagement to be wise."

"But it has been made," said she.

"And may be unmade."

"No;—unless by him."

"I shall tell him that it ought to be unmade,—for the happiness of both of you."

"He will not believe you."

Then Lord Hampstead shrugged his shoulders, and thus the conversation was finished.

It was now about the end of June, and the Marquis felt it to be a grievance that he should be carried away from the charm of political life in London. In the horror of the first revelation he had yielded, but had since began to feel that too much was being done in withdrawing him from Parliament. The Conservatives

were now in; but during the last Liberal Government he had consented so far to trammel himself with the bonds of office as to become Privy Seal for the concluding six months of its existence, and therefore felt his own importance in a party point of view. But having acceded to his wife he could not now go back, and was sulky. On the evening before their departure he was going to dine out with some of the party. His wife's heart was too deep in the great family question for any gaiety, and she intended to remain at home,—and to look after the final packings-up for the little lords.

"I really do not see why you should not have gone without me," the Marquis said, poking his head out of his dressing-room.

"Impossible," said the Marchioness.

"I don't see it at all."

"If he should appear on the scene ready to carry her off, what should I have done?"

Then the Marquis drew his head in again, and went on with his dressing. What, indeed, could he do himself if the man were to appear on the scene, and if his daughter should declare herself willing to go off with him?

When the Marquis went to his dinner party the Marchioness dined with Lady Frances. There was no one else present but the two servants who waited on them, and hardly a word was spoken. The Marchioness felt that an awful silence was becoming in the situation. Lady Frances merely determined more strongly than ever that the situation should not last very long. She would go abroad now, but would let her father understand that the kind of life planned out for her was one that she could not endure. If she was supposed to have disgraced her position, let her be sent away.

As soon as the melancholy meal was over the two ladies separated, the Marchioness going up-stairs among her own children. A more careful, more affectionate, perhaps, I may say, a more idolatrous mother never lived. Every little want belonging to them,—for even little lords have wants,—was a care to her. To see them washed and put in and out of their duds was perhaps the greatest pleasure of her life. To her eyes they were pearls of aristocratic loveliness; and, indeed, they were fine healthy bairns, clean-limbed, bright-eyed, with grand appetites, and never cross as long as they were allowed either to romp and make a noise, or else to sleep. Lord Frederic, the eldest, was already in words of two syllables, and sometimes had a bad time with them. Lord Augustus was the owner of great ivory letters of which he contrived to make playthings. Lord Gregory had not as yet been introduced to any of the torments of education. There was an old English clergyman attached to the family who was supposed to be their tutor, but whose chief duty consisted in finding conversation for the Marquis when there was no one else to talk to him. There was also a French governess and a Swiss maid. But as they both learned English quicker than the children learned French, they were not serviceable for the purpose at first intended. The Marchioness had resolved that her children should talk three or four languages as fluently as their own, and that they should learn them without any of the agonies generally incident to tuition. In that she had not as yet succeeded.

She seated herself for a few minutes among the boxes and portmanteaus in the midst of which the children were disporting themselves prior to their final withdrawal to bed. No mother was ever so blessed,—if only, if only! “Mamma,” said Lord Frederic, “where’s

Jack?" "Jack" absolutely was intended to signify Lord Hampstead.

"Fred, did not I say that you should not call him Jack?"

"He say he is Jack," declared Lord Augustus, rolling up in between his mother's knees with an impetus which would have upset her had she not been a strong woman and accustomed to these attacks.

"That is only because he is good-natured, and likes to play with you. You should call him Hampstead."

"Mamma, wasn't he christianed?" asked the eldest.

"Yes, of course he was christened, my dear," said the mother, sadly,—thinking how very much of the ceremony had been thrown away upon the unbelieving, godless young man. Then she superintended the putting to bed, thinking what a terrible bar to her happiness had been created by that first unfortunate marriage of her husband's. Oh, that she would be stepmother to a daughter who desired to fling herself into the arms of a clerk in the Post Office! And then that an "un-christianed," that an infidel, republican, un-English, heir should stand in the way of her darling boy! She had told herself a thousand times that the Devil was speaking to her when she had dared to wish that,—that Lord Hampstead was not there! She had put down the wish in her heart very often, telling herself that it came from the Devil. She had made a faint struggle to love the young man,—which had resulted in constrained civility. It would have been unnatural to her to love any but her own. Now she thought how glorious her Frederic would have been as Lord Hampstead,—and how infinitely better it would have been, how infinitely better it would be, for all the Traffords, for all the nobles of England, and for the country at large! But in

thinking this she knew that she was a sinner, and she endeavoured to crush the sin. Was it not tantamount to wishing that her husband's son was—dead?

CHAPTER IV.

LADY FRANCES.

THERE is something so sad in the condition of a girl who is known to be in love, and has to undergo the process of being made ashamed of it by her friends, that one wonders that any young woman can bear it. Most young women cannot bear it, and either give up their love or say that they do. A young man who has got into debt, or been plucked,—or even when he has declared himself to be engaged to a penniless young lady, which is worse,—is supposed merely to have gone after his kind, and done what was to be expected of him. The mother never looks at him with that enduring anger by which she intends to wear out the daughter's constancy. The father frets and fumes, pays the debts, prepares the way for a new campaign, and merely shrugs his shoulders about the proposed marriage, which he regards simply as an impossibility. But the girl is held to have disgraced herself. Though it is expected of her, or at any rate hoped, that she will get married in due time, yet the falling in love with a man,—which is, we must suppose, a preliminary step to marriage,—is a wickedness. Even among the ordinary Joneses and Browns of the world we see that it is so. When we are intimate enough with the Browns to be aware of Jane Brown's passion, we understand the father's manner and the mother's look. The very ser-

vants about the house are aware that she has given way to her feelings, and treat her accordingly. Her brothers are ashamed of her. Whereas she, if her brother be in love with Jemima Jones, applauds him, sympathizes with him, and encourages him.

There are heroines who live through it all, and are true to the end. There are many pseudo-heroines who intend to do so, but break down. The pseudo-heroine generally breaks down when young Smith,—not so very young,—has been taken in as a partner by Messrs. Smith and Walker, and comes in her way, in want of a wife. The persecution is, at any rate, so often efficacious as to make fathers and mothers feel it to be their duty to use it. It need not be said here how high above the ways of the Browns soared the ideas of the Marchioness of Kingsbury. But she felt that it would be her duty to resort to the measures which they would have adopted, and she was determined that the Marquis should do the same. A terrible evil, an incurable evil, had already been inflicted. Many people, alas, would know that Lady Frances had disgraced herself. She, the Marchioness, had been unable to keep the secret from her own sister, Lady Persiflage, and Lady Persiflage would undoubtedly tell it to others. Her own lady's maid knew it. The Marquis himself was the most indiscreet of men. Hampstead would see no cause for secrecy. Roden would, of course, boast of it all through the Post Office. The letter-carriers who attended upon Park Lane would have talked the matter over with the footmen at the area gate. There could be no hope of secrecy. All the young marquises and unmarried earls would know that Lady Frances Trafford was in love with the "postman." But time, and care, and strict precaution might prevent the final

misery of a marriage. Then, if the Marquis would be generous, some young Earl, or at least a Baron, might be induced to forget the "postman," and to take the noble lily, soiled, indeed, but made gracious by gilding. Her darlings must suffer. Any excess of money given would be at their cost. But anything would be better than a Post Office clerk for a brother-in-law.

Such were the views as to their future life with which the Marchioness intended to accompany her step-daughter to their Saxon residence. The Marquis, with less of a fixed purpose, was inclined in the same way. "I quite agree that they should be separated;—quite," he said. "It mustn't be heard of;—certainly not; certainly not. Not a shilling,—unless she behaves herself properly. Of course she will have her fortune, but not to bestow it in such a manner as that."

His own idea was to see them all settled in the château, and then, if possible, to hurry back to London before the season was quite at an end. His wife laid strong injunctions on him as to absolute secrecy, having forgotten, probably, that she herself had told the whole story to Lady Persiflage. The Marquis quite agreed. Secrecy was indispensable. As for him, was it likely that he should speak of a matter so painful and so near to his heart! Nevertheless he told it all to Mr. Greenwood, the gentleman who acted as tutor, private secretary, and chaplain in the house.

Lady Frances had her own ideas, as to this going away and living abroad, very strongly developed in her mind. They intended to persecute her till she should change her purpose. She intended to persecute them till they should change theirs. She knew herself too well, she thought, to have any fear as to her own persistency. That the Marchioness should persuade, or

even persecute, her out of an engagement to which she had assented, she felt to be quite out of the question. In her heart she despised the Marchioness,—bearing with her till the time should come in which she would be delivered from the nuisance of surveillance under such a woman. In her father she trusted much, knowing him to be affectionate, believing him to be still opposed to those aristocratic dogmas which were a religion to the Marchioness,—feeling probably that in his very weakness she would find her best strength. If her stepmother should in truth become cruel, then her father would take her part against his wife. There must be a period of discomfort,—say, six months; and then would come the time in which she would be able to say, “I have tried myself, and know my own mind, and I intend to go home and get myself married.” She would take care that her declaration to this effect should not come as a sudden blow. The six months should be employed in preparing for it. The Marchioness might be persistent in preaching her views during the six months, but so would Lady Frances be persistent in preaching hers.

She had not accepted the man’s love when he had offered it, without thinking much about it. The lesson which she had heard in her earlier years from her mother had sunk deep into her very soul,—much more deeply than the teacher of those lessons had supposed. That teacher had never intended to inculcate as a doctrine that rank is a mistake. No one had thought more than she of the incentives provided by rank to high duty. “Noblesse oblige.” The lesson had been engraved on her heart, and might have been read in all the doings of her life. But she had endeavoured to make it understood by her children that they should not

be over-quick to claim the privileges of rank. Too many such would be showered on them,—too many for their own welfare. Let them never be greedy to take with outstretched hands those good things of which Chance had provided for them so much more than their fair share. Let them remember that after all there was no virtue in having been born a child to a Marquis. Let them remember how much more it was to be a useful man, or a kind woman. So the lessons had been given,—and had gone for more than had been intended. Then all the renown of their father's old politics assisted,—the re-election of the drunken tailor,—the jeerings of friends who were high enough and near enough to dare to jeer,—the convictions of childhood that it was a fine thing, because peculiar for a Marquis and his belongings, to be Radical;—and, added to this, there was contempt for the specially noble graces of their stepmother. Thus it was that Lord Hampstead was brought to his present condition of thinking,—and Lady Frances.

Her convictions were quite as strong as his, though they did not assume the same form. With a girl, at an early age, all her outlookings into the world have something to do with love and its consequences. When a young man takes his leaning either towards Liberalism or Conservatism he is not at all actuated by any feeling as to how some possible future young woman may think on the subject. But the girl, if she entertains such ideas at all, dreams of them as befitting the man whom she may some day hope to love. Should she, a Protestant, become a Roman Catholic and then a nun, she feels that in giving up her hope for a man's love she is making the greatest sacrifice in her power for the Saviour she is taking to her heart. If she devotes herself to music, or the pencil, or to languages, the effect which her ac-

accomplishments may have on some beau ideal of manhood is present to her mind. From the very first she is dressing herself unconsciously in the mirror of a man's eyes. Quite unconsciously, all this had been present to Lady Frances as month after month and year after year she had formed her strong opinions. She had thought of no man's love,—had thought but little of loving any man,—but in her meditations as to the weaknesses and vanity of rank there had always been present that idea,—how would it be with her if such a one should ask for her hand, such a one as she might find among those of whom she dreamed as being more noble than Dukes, even though they were numbered among the world's proletaries? Then she had told herself that if any such a one should come,—if at any time any should be allowed by herself to come,—he should be estimated by his merits, whether Duke or proletary. With her mind in such a state she had of course been prone to receive kindly the overtures of her brother's friend.

What was there missing in him that a girl should require? It was so that she had asked herself the question. As far as manners were concerned, this man was a gentleman. She was quite sure of that. Whether proletary or not, there was nothing about him to offend the taste of the best-born of ladies. That he was better educated than any of the highly-bred young men she saw around her, she was quite sure. He had more to talk about than others. Of his birth and family she knew nothing, but rather prided herself in knowing nothing, because of that doctrine of hers that a man is to be estimated only by what he is himself, and not at all by what he may derive from others. Of his personal appearance, which went far with her, she was very proud. He was certainly a handsome young man, and endowed

with all outward gifts of manliness: easy in his gait, but not mindful of it, with motions of his body naturally graceful but never studied, with his head erect, with a laugh in his eye, well-made as to his hands and feet. Neither his intellect nor his political convictions would have recommended a man to her heart, unless there had been something in the outside to please her eye, and from the first moment in which she had met him he had never been afraid of her,—had ventured when he disagreed from her to laugh at her, and even to scold her. There is no barrier in a girl's heart so strong against love as the feeling that the man in question stands in awe of her.

She had taken some time before she had given him her answer, and had thought much of the perils before her. She had known that she could not divest herself of her rank. She had acknowledged to herself that, whether it was for good or bad, a Marquis's daughter could not be like another girl. She owed much to her father, much to her brothers, something even to her stepmother. But was the thing she proposed to do of such a nature as to be regarded as an evil to her family? She could see that there had been changes in the ways of the world during the last century,—changes continued from year to year. Rank was not so high as it used to be,—and in consequence those without rank not so low. The Queen's daughter had married a subject. Lords John and Lords Thomas were every day going into this and the other business. There were instances enough of ladies of title doing the very thing which she proposed to herself. Why should a Post Office clerk be lower than another?

Then came the great question, whether it behoved her to ask her father. Girls in general ask their mother,

and send the lover to the father. She had no mother. She was quite sure that she would not leave her happiness in the hands of the present Marchioness. Were she to ask her father she knew that the matter would be at once settled against her. Her father was too much under the dominion of his wife to be allowed to have an opinion of his own on such a matter. So she declared to herself, and then determined that she would act on her own responsibility. She would accept the man, and then take the first opportunity of telling her stepmother what she had done. And so it was. It was only early on that morning that she had given her answer to George Roden,—and early on that morning she had summoned up her courage, and told her whole story.

The station to which she was taken was a large German schloss, very comfortably arranged, with the mountain as a background and the River Elbe running close beneath its terraces, on which the Marquis had spent some money, and made it a residence to be envied by the eyes of all passers-by. It had been bought for its beauty in a freak, but had never been occupied for more than a week at a time till this occasion. Under other circumstances Lady Frances would have been as happy here as the day was long, and had often expressed a desire to be allowed to stay for a while at Königsgraaf. But now, though she made an attempt to regard their sojourn in the place as one of the natural events of their life, she could not shake off the idea of a prison. The Marchioness was determined that the idea of a prison should not be shaken off. In the first few days she said not a word about the objectionable lover, nor did the Marquis. That had been settled between them. But neither was anything said on any other subject. There

was a sternness in every motion, and a grim silence seemed to preside in the château, except when the boys were present,—and an attempt was made to separate her from her brothers as much as possible, which she was more inclined to resent than any other ill usage which was adopted towards her. After about a fortnight it was announced that the Marquis was to return to London. He had received letters from “the party” which made it quite necessary that he should be there. When this was told to Lady Frances not a word was said as to the probable duration of their own stay at the château.

“Papa,” she said, “you are going back to London?”

“Yes, my dear. My presence in town is imperatively necessary.”

“How long are we to stay here?”

“How long?”

“Yes, papa. I like Königsgraaf very much. I always thought it the prettiest place I know. But I do not like looking forward to staying here without knowing when I am to go away.”

“You had better ask your mamma, my dear.”

“Mamma never says anything to me. It would be no good my asking her. Papa, you ought to tell me something before you go away.”

“Tell you what?”

“Or let me tell you something.”

“What do you want to tell me, Frances?” In saying this he assumed his most angry tone and sternest countenance,—which, however, were not very angry or very stern, and had no effect in frightening his daughter. He did not, in truth, wish to say a word about the Post Office clerk before he made his escape, and would have been very glad to frighten her enough to make her silent had that been possible.

"Papa, I want you to know that it will do no good shutting me up there."

"Nobody shuts you up."

"I mean here in Saxony. Of course I shall stay for some time, but you cannot expect that I shall remain here always."

"Who has talked about always?"

"I understand that I am brought here to be——out of Mr. Roden's way."

"I would rather not speak of that young man."

"But, papa,—if he is to be my husband——"

"He is not to be your husband."

"It will be so, papa, though I should be kept here ever so long. That is what I want you to understand. Having given my word,—and so much more than my word,—I certainly shall not go back from it. I can understand that you should carry me off here so as to try and wean me from it——"

"It is quite out of the question; impossible!"

"No, papa. If he choose,—and I choose,—no one can prevent us." As she said this she looked him full in the face.

"Do you mean to say that you owe no obedience to your parents?"

"To you, papa, of course I owe obedience,—to a certain extent. There does come a time, I suppose, in which a daughter may use her own judgment as to her own happiness."

"And disgrace all her family?"

"I do not think that I shall disgrace mine. What I want you to understand, papa, is this,—that you will not ensure my obedience by keeping me here. I think I should be more likely to be submissive at home. There is an idea in enforced control which is hardly compatible with obedience. I don't suppose you will lock me up."

“You have no right to talk to me in that way.”

“I want to explain that our being here can do no good. When you are gone mamma and I will only be very unhappy together. She won't talk to me, and will look at me as though I were a poor lost creature. I don't think that I am a lost creature at all, but I shall be just as much lost here as though I were at home in England.”

“When you come to talking you are as bad as your brother,” said the Marquis as he left her. Only that the expression was considered to be unfit for female ears, he would have accused her of “talking the hind legs off a dog.”

When he was gone the life at Königsgraaf became very sombre indeed. Mr. George Roden's name was never mentioned by either of the ladies. There was the Post Office, no doubt, and the Post Office was at first left open to her; but there soon came a time in which she was deprived of this consolation. With such a guardian as the Marchioness, it was not likely that free correspondence should be left open to her.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. RODEN.

GEORGE RODEN, the Post Office clerk, lived with his mother at Holloway, about three miles from his office. There they occupied a small house which had been taken when their means were smaller even than at present;—for this had been done before the young man had made his way into the official elysium of St. Martin's-le-Grand. This had been effected about five years since, during which time he had risen to an income of £170.

As his mother had means of her own amounting to about double as much, and as her personal expenses were small, they were enabled to live in comfort. She was a lady of whom none around knew anything, but there had gone abroad a rumour among her neighbours that there was something of a mystery attached to her, and there existed a prevailing feeling that she was at any rate a well-born lady. Few people at Holloway knew either her or her son. But there were some who condescended to watch them, and to talk about them. It was ascertained that Mrs. Roden usually went to church on Sunday morning, but that her son never did so. It was known, too, that a female friend called upon her regularly once a week; and it was noted in the annals of Holloway that this female friend came always at three o'clock on a Monday. Intelligent observers had become aware that the return visit was made in the course of the week, but not always made on one certain day;—from which circumstances various surmises arose as to the means, whereabouts, and character of the visitor. Mrs. Roden always went in a cab. The lady, whose name was soon known to be Mrs. Vincent, came in a brougham, which for a time was supposed to be her own peculiar property. The man who drove it was so well arrayed as to hat, cravat, and coat, as to leave an impression that he must be a private servant; but one feminine observer, keener than others, saw the man on an unfortunate day descend from his box at a public-house, and knew at once that the trousers were the trousers of a hired driver from a livery-stable. Nevertheless it was manifest that Mrs. Vincent was better to do in the world than Mrs. Roden, because she could afford to hire a would-be private carriage; and it was imagined also that she was a lady accustomed to remain at home of an afternoon, probably with the object of receiving visitors, because

Mrs. Roden made her visits indifferently on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. It was suggested also that Mrs. Vincent was no friend to the young clerk, because it was well known that he was never there when the lady came, and it was supposed that he never accompanied his mother on the return visits. He had, indeed, on one occasion been seen to get out of the cab with his mother at their own door, but it was strongly surmised that she had then picked him up at the Post Office. His official engagements might, indeed, have accounted for all this naturally; but the ladies of Holloway were well aware that the humanity of the Postmaster-General allowed a Saturday half-holiday to his otherwise overworked officials, and they were sure that so good a son as George Roden would occasionally have accompanied his mother, had there been no especial reason against it. From this further surmises arose. Some glance had fallen from the eye of the visitor lady, or perhaps some chance word had been heard from her lips, which created an opinion that she was religious. She probably objected to George Roden because he was anti-religious, or at any rate anti-church, meeting, or chapel-going. It had become quite decided at Holloway that Mrs. Vincent would not put up with the young clerk's infidelity. And it was believed that there had been "words" between the two ladies themselves on the subject of religion,—as to which probably there was no valid foundation, it being an ascertained fact that the two maids who were employed by Mrs. Roden were never known to tell anything of their mistress.

It was decided at Holloway that Mrs. Roden and Mrs. Vincent were cousins. They were like enough in face and near enough in age to have been sisters; but old Mrs. Demijohn, of No. 10, Paradise Row, had de-

clared that had George been a nephew his aunt would not have wearied in her endeavour to convert him. In such a case there would have been intimacy in spite of disapproval. But a first cousin once removed might be allowed to go to the Mischief in his own way. Mrs. Vincent was supposed to be the elder cousin,—perhaps three or four years the elder,—and to have therefore something of an authority, but not much. She was stouter, too, less careful to hide what grey hairs years might have produced, and showing manifestly by the nature of her bonnets and shawls that she despised the vanities of the world. Not but that she was always handsomely dressed, as Mrs. Demijohn was very well aware. Less than a hundred a year could not have clothed Mrs. Vincent, whereas Mrs. Roden, as all the world perceived, did not spend half the money. But who does not know that a lady may repudiate vanity in rich silks and cultivate the world in woollen stuffs, or even in calico? Nothing was more certain to Mrs. Demijohn than that Mrs. Vincent was severe, and that Mrs. Roden was soft and gentle. It was assumed also that the two ladies were widows, as no husband or sign of a husband had appeared on the scene. Mrs. Vincent showed manifestly from her deportment, as well as from her title, that she had been a married woman. As to Mrs. Roden, of course, there was no doubt.

In regard to all this the reader may take the settled opinions of Mrs. Demijohn and of Holloway as being nearly true. Riddles may be read very accurately by those who will give sufficient attention and ample time to the reading of them. They who will devote twelve hours a day to the unravelling of acrostics, may discover nearly all the enigmas of a weekly newspaper with a separate editor for such difficulties. Mrs. Demijohn had

almost arrived at the facts. The two ladies were second cousins. Mrs. Vincent was a widow, was religious, was austere, was fairly well off, and had quarrelled altogether with her distant relative George of the Post Office. Mrs. Roden, though she went to church, was not so well given to religious observances as her cousin would have her. Hence words had come which Mrs. Roden had borne with equanimity, but had received without effect. Nevertheless the two women loved each other dearly, and it was a great part of the life of each of them that these weekly visits should be made. There was one great fact, as to which Mrs. Demijohn and Holloway were in the wrong. Mrs. Roden was not a widow.

It was not till the Kingsburys had left London that George told his mother of his engagement. She was well acquainted with his intimacy with Lord Hampstead, and knew that he had been staying at Hendon Hall with the Kingsbury family. There had been no reticence between the mother and son as to these people, in regard to whom she had frequently cautioned him that there was danger in such associations with people moving altogether in a different sphere. In answer to this the son had always declared that he did not see the danger. He had not run after Lord Hampstead. Circumstances had thrown them together. They had originally met each other in a small political debating society, and gradually friendship had grown. The lord had sought him, and not he the lord. That, according to his own idea, had been right. Difference in rank, difference in wealth, difference in social regard required as much as that. He, when he had discovered who was the young man whom he had met, stood off somewhat, and allowed the friendship to spring from the other side. He had been slow to accept favour,—even at first to ac-

cept hospitality. But whenever the ice had, as he said, been thoroughly broken, then he thought that there was no reason why they should not pull each other out of the cold water together. As for danger, what was there to fear? The Marchioness would not like it? Very probably. The Marchioness was not very much to Hampstead, and was nothing at all to him. The Marquis would not really like it. Perhaps not. But in choosing a friend a young man is not supposed to follow altogether his father's likings,—much less need the chosen friend follow them. But the Marquis, as George pointed out to his mother, was hardly more like other marquises than the son was like other marquis's sons. There was a Radical strain in the family, as was made clear by that tailor who was still sitting for the borough of Edgeware. Mrs. Roden, however, though she lived so much alone, seeing hardly anything of the world except as Mrs. Vincent might be supposed to represent the world, had learned that the feelings and political convictions of the Marquis were hardly what they had been before he had married his present wife. "You may be sure, George," she had said, "that like to like is as safe a motto for friendship as it is for love."

"Not a doubt, mother," he replied; "but before you act upon it you must define 'like.' What makes two men like—or a man and a woman?"

"Outside circumstances of the world more than anything else," she answered, boldly.

"I would fancy that the inside circumstances of the mind would have more to do with it." She shook her head at him, pleasantly, softly, and lovingly,—but still with a settled purpose of contradiction. "I have admitted all along," he continued, "that low birth——"

"I have said nothing of low birth!" Here was a

point on which there did not exist full confidence between the mother and son, but in regard to which the mother was always attempting to reassure the son, while he would assume something against himself which she would not allow to pass without an attempt of faint denial.

"That birth low by comparison," he continued, going on with his sentence, "should not take upon itself as much as may be allowed to nobility by descent is certain. Though the young prince may be superior in his gifts to the young shoeblack, and would best show his princeliness by cultivating the shoeblack, still the shoeblack should wait to be cultivated. The world has created a state of things in which the shoeblack cannot do otherwise without showing an arrogance and impudence by which he could achieve nothing."

"Which, too, would make him black his shoes very badly."

"No doubt. That will have to come to pass any way, because the nobler employments to which he will be raised by the appreciating prince will cause him to drop his shoes."

"Is Lord Hampstead to cause you to drop the Post Office?"

"Not at all. He is not a prince nor am I a shoeblack. Though we are far apart, we are not so far apart as to make such a change essential to our acquaintance. But I was saying—— I don't know what I was saying."

"You were defining what 'like' means. But people always get muddled when they attempt definitions," said the mother.

"Though it depends somewhat on externals, it has more to do with internals. That is what I mean. A man and woman might live together with most enduring

love, though one had been noble and wealthy and the other poor and a nobody. But a thorough brute and a human being of fine conditions can hardly live together and love each other."

"That is true," she said. "That I fear is true."

"I hope it is true."

"It has often to be tried, generally to the great detriment of the better nature."

All this, however, had been said before George Roden had spoken a word to Lady Frances, and had referred only to the friendship as it was growing between her son and the young lord.

The young lord had come on various occasions to the house at Holloway, and had there made himself thoroughly pleasant to his friend's mother. Lord Hampstead had a way of making himself pleasant in which he never failed when he chose to exercise it. And he did exercise it almost always,—always, indeed, unless he was driven to be courteously disagreeable by opposition to his own peculiar opinion. In shooting, fishing, and other occupations not approved of, he would fall into a line of argument, seemingly and indeed truly good-humoured, which was apt, however, to be aggravating to his opponent. In this way he would make himself thoroughly odious to his stepmother, with whom he had not one sentiment in common. In other respects his manners were invariably sweet, with an assumption of intimacy which was not unbecoming; and thus he had greatly recommended himself to Mrs. Roden. Who does not know the fashion in which the normal young man conducts himself when he is making a morning call? He has come there because he means to be civil. He would not be there unless he wished to make himself popular. He is carrying out some recognized purpose of

society. He would fain be agreeable if it were possible. He would enjoy the moment if he could. But it is clearly his conviction that he is bound to get through a certain amount of altogether uninteresting conversation, and then to get himself out of the room with as little awkwardness as may be. Unless there be a pretty girl, and chance favour him with her special companionship, he does not for a moment suppose that any social pleasure is to be enjoyed. That rational amusement can be got out of talking to Mrs. Jones does not enter into his mind. And yet Mrs. Jones is probably a fair specimen of that general society in which every one wishes to mingle. Society is to him generally made up of several parts, each of which is a pain, though the total is deemed to be desirable. The pretty girl episode is no doubt an exception,—though that also has its pains when matter for conversation does not come readily, or when conversation, coming too readily, is rebuked. The morning call may be regarded as a period of unmitigated agony. Now it has to be asserted on Lord Hampstead's behalf that he could talk with almost any Mrs. Jones freely and pleasantly while he remained, and take his departure without that dislocating struggle which is too common. He would make himself at ease, and discourse as though he had known the lady all his life. There is nothing which a woman likes so much as this, and by doing this Lord Hampstead had done much, if not to overcome, at any rate to quiet the sense of danger of which Mrs. Roden had spoken.

But this refers to a time in which nothing was known at Holloway as to Lady Frances. Very little had been said of the family between the mother and son. Of the Marquis George Roden had wished to think well, but had hardly succeeded. Of the stepmother he had never

even wished to do so. She had from the first been known to him as a woman thoroughly wedded to aristocratic prejudices,—who regarded herself as endowed with certain privileges which made her altogether superior to other human beings. Hampstead himself could not even pretend to respect her. Of her Roden had said very little to his mother, simply speaking of her as the Marchioness, who was in no way related to Hampstead. Of Lady Frances he had simply said that there was a girl there endowed with such a spirit, that of all girls of her class she must surely be the best and noblest. Then his mother had shuddered inwardly, thinking that here too there might be possible danger; but she had shrunk from speaking of the special danger even to her son.

“How has the visit gone?” Mrs. Roden asked, when her son had already been some hours in the house. This was after that last visit to Hendon Hall, in which Lady Frances had promised to become his wife.

“Pretty well, taking it altogether.”

“I know that something has disappointed you.”

“No, indeed, nothing. I have been somewhat abashed.”

“What have they said to you?” she asked.

“Very little but what was kind,—just one word at the last.”

“Something, I know, has hurt you,” said the mother.

“Lady Kingsbury has made me aware that she dislikes me thoroughly. It is very odd how one person can do that to another almost without a word spoken.”

“I told you, George, that there would be danger in going there.”

“There would be no danger in that if there were nothing more.”

"What more is there then?"

"There would be no danger in that if Lady Kingsbury was simply Hampstead's stepmother."

"What more is she?"

"She is stepmother also to Lady Frances. Oh, mother!"

"George, what has happened?" she asked.

"I have asked Lady Frances to be my wife."

"Your wife?"

"And she has promised."

"Oh, George!"

"Yes, indeed, mother. Now you can perceive that she indeed may be a danger. When I think of the power of tormenting her stepdaughter which may rest in her hands I can hardly forgive myself for doing as I have done."

"And the Marquis?" asked the mother.

"I know nothing as yet as to what his feelings may be. I have had no opportunity of speaking to him since the little occurrence took place. A word escaped me, an unthought-of word, which her ladyship overheard, and for which she rebuked me. Then I left the house."

"What word?"

"Just a common word of greeting, a word that would be common among dear friends, but which, coming from me to her, told all the story. I forgot the prefix which was due from such a one as I am to such as she is. I can understand with what horror I must henceforward be regarded by Lady Kingsbury."

"What will the Marquis say?"

"I shall be a horror to him also,—an unutterable horror. The idea of contact so vile will cure him at once of all his little Radical longings."

“And Hampstead?”

“Nothing, I think, can cure Hampstead of his convictions;—but even he is not well pleased.”

“Has he quarrelled with you?”

“No, not that. He is too noble to quarrel on such offence. He is too noble even to take offence on such a cause. But he refuses to believe that good will come of it. And you, mother?”

“Oh, George, I doubt, I doubt.”

“You will not congratulate me?”

“What am I to say? I fear more than I can hope.”

“When I tell you that she is noble at all points, noble in heart, noble in beauty, noble in that dignity which a woman should always carry with her, that she is as sweet a creature as God ever created to bless a man with, will you not then congratulate me?”

“I would her birth were other than it is,” said the mother.

“I would have her altered in nothing,” said the son. “Her birth is the smallest thing about her, but such as she is I would have her altered in nothing.”

CHAPTER VI.

PARADISE ROW.

ABOUT a fortnight after George Roden's return to Holloway,—a fortnight passed by the mother in meditation as to her son's glorious but dangerous love,—Lord Hampstead called at No. 11, Paradise Row. Mrs. Roden lived at No. 11, and Mrs. Demijohn lived at No. 10, the house opposite. There had already been some discussion in Holloway about Lord Hampstead, but nothing had as yet been discovered. He might have been at

the house on various previous occasions, but had come in so unpretending a manner as hardly to have done more than to cause himself to be regarded as a stranger in Holloway. He was known to be George's friend, because he had been first seen coming with George on a Saturday afternoon. He had also called on a Sunday and walked away, down the Row, with George. Mrs. Demijohn concluded that he was a brother clerk in the Post Office, and had expressed an opinion that "it did not signify," meaning thereby to imply that Holloway need not interest itself about the stranger. A young Government clerk would naturally have another young Government clerk for his friend. Twice Lord Hampstead had come down in an omnibus from Islington; on which occasion it was remarked that as he did not come on Saturday there must be something wrong. A clerk, with Saturday half-holidays, ought not to be away from his work on Mondays and Tuesdays. Mrs. Duffer, who was regarded in Paradise Row as being very inferior to Mrs. Demijohn, suggested that the young man might, perhaps, not be a Post Office clerk. This, however, was ridiculed. Where should a Post Office clerk find his friends except among Post Office clerks? "Perhaps he is coming after the widow," suggested Mrs. Duffer. But this also was received with dissent. Mrs. Demijohn declared that Post Office clerks knew better than to marry widows with no more than two or three hundred a year, and old enough to be their mothers. "But why does he come on a Tuesday?" asked Mrs. Duffer; "and why does he come alone?" "Oh you dear old Mrs. Duffer!" said Clara Demijohn, the old lady's niece, naturally thinking that it might not be unnatural that handsome young men should come to Paradise Row.

All this, however, had been as nothing to what oc-

curred in the Row on the occasion which is now about to be described.

"Aunt Jemima," exclaimed Clara Demijohn, looking out of the window, "there's that young man come again to Number Eleven, riding on horseback, with a groom behind to hold him!"

"Groom to hold him!" exclaimed Mrs. Demijohn, jumping, with all her rheumatism, quickly from her seat, and trotting to the window.

"You look if there aint, — with boots and breeches."

"It must be another," said Mrs. Demijohn, after a pause, during which she had been looking intently at the empty saddle of the horse which the groom was leading slowly up and down the Row.

"It's the same that came with young Roden that Saturday," said Clara; "only he hadn't been walking, and he looked nicer than ever."

"You can hire them all, horses and groom," said Mrs. Demijohn; "but he'd never make his money last till the end of the month if he went on in that way."

"They aint hired. They're his own," said Clara.

"How do you know, Miss?"

"By the colour of his boots, and the way he touched his hat, and because his gloves are clean. He aint a Post Office clerk at all, Aunt Jemima."

"I wonder whether he can be coming after the widow," said Mrs. Demijohn. After this Clara escaped out of the room, leaving her aunt fixed at the window. Such a sight as that groom and those two horses moving up and down together had never been seen in the Row before. Clara put on her hat and ran across hurriedly to Mrs. Duffer, who lived at No. 15, next door but one to Mrs. Roden. But she was altogether too late to communicate the news as news.

"I knew he wasn't a Post Office clerk," said Mrs. Duffer, who had seen Lord Hampstead ride up the street; "but who he is, or why, or wherefore, it is beyond me to conjecture. But I never will give up my opinion again, talking to your aunt. I suppose she holds out still that he's a Post Office clerk."

"She thinks he might have hired them."

"Oh my! Hired them!"

"But did you ever see anything so noble as the way he got off his horse? As for hire, that's nonsense. He's been getting off that horse every day of his life." Thus it was that Paradise Row was awe-stricken by this last coming of George Roden's friend.

It was an odd thing to do,—this riding down to Holloway. No one else would have done it, either lord or Post Office clerk;—with a hired horse or with private property. There was a hot July sunshine, and the roads across from Hendon Hall consisted chiefly of paved streets. But Lord Hampstead always did things as others would not do them. It was too far to walk in the midday sun, and therefore he rode. There would be no servant at Mrs. Roden's house to hold his horse, and therefore he brought one of his own. He did not see why a man on horseback should attract more attention at Holloway than at Hyde Park Corner. Had he guessed the effect which he and his horse would have had in Paradise Row he would have come by some other means.

Mrs. Roden at first received him with considerable embarrassment,—which he probably observed, but in speaking to her seemed not to observe. "Very hot, indeed," he said;—"too hot for riding, as I found soon after I started. I suppose George has given up walking for the present."

"He still walks home, I think."

"If he had declared his purpose of doing so, he'd go on though he had sunstroke every afternoon."

"I hope he is not so obstinate as that, my lord."

"The most obstinate fellow I ever knew in my life! Though the world were to come to an end, he'd let it come rather than change his purpose. It's all very well for a man to keep his purpose, but he may overdo it."

"Has he been very determined lately in anything?"

"No;—nothing particular. I haven't seen him for the last week. I want him to come over and dine with me at Hendon one of these days. I'm all alone there." From this Mrs. Roden learnt that Lord Hampstead at any rate did not intend to quarrel with her son, and she learnt also that Lady Frances was no longer staying at the Hall. "I can send him home," continued the lord, "if he can manage to come down by the railway or the omnibus."

"I will give him your message, my lord."

"Tell him I start on the 21st. My yacht is at Cowes, and I shall go down there on that morning. I shall be away Heaven knows how long;—probably for a month. Vivian will be with me, and we mean to bask away our time in the Norway and Iceland seas, till he goes, like an idiot that he is, to his grouse-shooting. I should like to see George before I start. I said that I was all alone; but Vivian will be with me. George has met him before, and as they didn't cut each other's throats then I suppose they won't now."

"I will tell him all that," said Mrs. Roden.

Then there was a pause for a moment, after which Lord Hampstead went on in an altered voice. "Has he said anything to you since he was at Hendon;—as to my family, I mean?"

"He has told me something."

"I was sure he had. I should not have asked unless I had been quite sure. I know that he would tell you anything of that kind. Well?"

"What am I to say, Lord Hampstead?"

"What has he told you, Mrs. Roden?"

"He has spoken to me of your sister."

"But what has he said?"

"That he loves her."

"And that she loves him?"

"That he hopes so."

"He has said more than that, I take it. They have engaged themselves to each other."

"So I understand."

"What do you think of it, Mrs. Roden?"

"What can I think of it, Lord Hampstead? I hardly dare to think of it at all."

"Was it wise?"

"I suppose where love is concerned wisdom is not much considered."

"But people have to consider it. I hardly know how to think of it. To my idea it was not wise. And yet there is no one living whom I esteem so much as your son."

"You are very good, my lord."

"There is no goodness in it,—any more than in his liking for me. But I can indulge my fancy without doing harm to others. Lady Kingsbury thinks that I am an idiot because I do not live exclusively with counts and countesses; but in declining to take her advice I do not injure her much. She can talk about me and my infatuations among her friends with a smile. She will not be tortured by any feeling of disgrace. So with my father. He has an idea that I am out-Heroding Herod,

he having been Herod;—but there is nothing bitter in it to him. Those fine young gentlemen, my brothers, who are the dearest little chicks in the world, five and six and seven years old, will be able to laugh pleasantly at their elder brother when they grow up, as they will do, among the other idle young swells of the nation. That their brother and George Roden should be always together will not even vex them. They may probably receive some benefit themselves, may achieve some diminution of the folly natural to their position, by their advantage in knowing him. In looking at it all round, as far as that goes, there is not only satisfaction to me, but a certain pride. I am doing no more than I have a right to do. Whatever counter-influence I may introduce among my own people, will be good and wholesome. Do you understand me, Mrs. Roden?"

"I think so;—very clearly. I should be dull, if I did not."

"But it becomes different when one's sister is concerned. I am thinking of the happiness of other people."

"She, I suppose, will think of her own."

"Not exclusively, I hope."

"No; not that I am sure. But a girl, when she loves——"

"Yes; that is all true. But a girl situated like Frances is bound not to,—not to sacrifice those with whom Fame and Fortune have connected her. I can speak plainly to you, Mrs. Roden, because you know what are my own opinions about many things."

"George has no sister, no girl belonging to him; but if he had, and you loved her, would you abstain from marrying her lest you should sacrifice your—connections?"

"The word has offended you?"

"Not in the least. It is a word true to the purpose

in hand. I understand the sacrifice you mean. Lady Kingsbury's feelings would be—sacrificed were her daughter,—even her stepdaughter,—to become my boy's husband. She supposes that her girl's birth is superior to my boy's."

"There are so many meanings to that word 'birth.'"

"I will take it all as you mean, Lord Hampstead, and will not be offended. My boy, as he is, is no match for your sister. Both Lord and Lady Kingsbury would think that there had been—a sacrifice. It might be that those little lords would not in future years be wont to talk at their club of their brother-in-law, the Post Office clerk, as they would of some earl or some duke with whom they might have become connected. Let us pass it by, and acknowledge that there would be—a sacrifice. So there will be should you marry below your degree. The sacrifice would be greater because it would be carried on to some future Marquis of Kingsbury. Would you practise such self-denial as that you demand from your sister?"

Lord Hampstead considered the matter a while, and then answered the question. "I do not think that the two cases would be quite analogous."

"Where is the difference?"

"There is something more delicate, more nice, requiring greater caution in the conduct of a girl than of a man."

"Quite so, Lord Hampstead. Where conduct is in question, the girl is bound to submit to stricter laws. I may explain that by saying that the girl is lost for ever who gives herself up to unlawful love,—whereas, for the man, the way back to the world's respect is only too easy, even should he, on that score, have lost aught of the world's respect. The same law runs through every

act of a girl's life, as contrasted with the acts of men. But in this act,—the act now supposed of marrying a gentleman whom she loves,—your sister would do nothing which should exclude her from the respect of good men or the society of well-ordered ladies. I do not say that the marriage would be well-assorted. I do not recommend it. Though my boy's heart is dearer to me than anything else can be in the world, I can see that it may be fit that his heart should be made to suffer. But when you talk of the sacrifice which he and your sister are called on to make, so that others should be delivered from lesser sacrifices, I think you should ask what duty would require from yourself. I do not think she would sacrifice the noble blood of the Traffords more effectually than you would by a similar marriage." As she thus spoke she leant forward from her chair on the table, and looked him full in the face. And he felt, as she did so, that she was singularly handsome, greatly gifted, a woman noble to the eye and to the ear. She was pleading for her son,—and he knew that. But she had condescended to use no mean argument.

"If you will say that such a law is dominant among your class, and that it is one to which you would submit yourself, I will not repudiate it. But you shall not induce me to consent to it, by even a false idea as to the softer delicacy of the sex. That softer delicacy, with its privileges and duties, shall be made to stand for what it is worth, and to occupy its real ground. If you use it for other mock purposes, then I will quarrel with you." It was thus that she had spoken, and he understood it all.

"I am not brought in question," he said slowly.

"Cannot you put it to yourself as though you were

brought in question? You will at any rate admit that my argument is just."

"I hardly know. I must think of it. Such a marriage on my part would not outrage my stepmother, as would that of my sister."

"Outrage! You speak, Lord Hampstead, as though your mother would think that your sister would have disgraced herself as a woman!"

"I am speaking of her feelings,—not of mine. It would be different were I to marry in the same degree."

"Would it? Then I think that perhaps I had better counsel George not to go to Hendon Hall."

"My sister is not there. They are all in Germany."

"He had better not go where your sister will be thought of."

"I would not quarrel with your son for all the world."

"It will be better that you should. Do not suppose that I am pleading for him." That, however, was what he did suppose, and that was what she was doing. "I have told him already that I think that the prejudices will be too hard for him, and that he had better give it up before he adds to his own misery, and perhaps to hers. What I have said has not been in the way of pleading,—but only as showing the ground on which I think that such a marriage would be inexpedient. It is not that we, or your sister, are too bad or too low for such contact; but that you, on your side, are not as yet good enough or high enough."

"I will not dispute that with you, Mrs. Roden. But you will give him my message?"

"Yes; I will give him your message."

Then Lord Hampstead, having spent a full hour in the house, took his departure and rode away.

"Just an hour," said Clara Demijohn, who was still looking out of Mrs. Duffer's window. "What can they have been talking about?"

"I think he must be making up to the widow," said Mrs. Duffer, who was so lost in surprise as to be unable to suggest any new idea.

"He'd never have come with saddle horses to do that. She wouldn't be taken by a young man spending his money in that fashion. She'd like saving ways better. But they're his own horses, and his own man, and he's no more after the widow than he's after me," said Clara, laughing.

"I wish he were, my dear."

"There may be as good as him come yet, Mrs. Duffer. I don't think so much of their having horses and grooms. When they have these things they can't afford to have wives too,—and sometimes they can't afford to pay for either." Then, having seen the last of Lord Hampstead as he rode out of the Row, she went back to her mother's house.

But Mrs. Demijohn had been making use of her time while Clara and Mrs. Duffer had been wasting theirs in mere gazing and making vain surmises. As soon as she found herself alone the old woman got her bonnet and shawl, and going out slyly into the Row, made her way down to the end of the street in the direction opposite to that in which the groom was at that moment walking the horses. There she escaped the eyes of her niece and of the neighbours, and was enabled to wait unseen till the man, in his walking, came down to the spot at which she was standing. "My young man," she said in her most winning voice, when the groom came near her.

"What is it, Mum?"

"You'd like a glass of beer, wouldn't you;—after walking up and down so long?"

"No, I wouldn't, not just at present." He knew whom he served, and from whom it would become him to take beer.

"I'd be happy to pay for a pint," said Mrs. Demijohn, fingering a fourpenny bit so that he might see it.

"Thankye, Mum; no, I takes it reg'lar when I takes it. I'm on dooty just at present."

"Your master's horses, I suppose?"

"Whose else, Mum? His lordship don't ride generally nobody's 'orses but his own."

Here was a success! And the fourpenny bit saved! His lordship! "Of course not," said Mrs. Demijohn. "Why should he?"

"Why, indeed, Mum?"

"Lord——; Lord——;—Lord who, is he?"

The groom poked up his hat, and scratched his head, and bethought himself. A servant generally wishes to do what honour he can to his master. This man had no desire to gratify an inquisitive old woman, but he thought it derogatory to his master and to himself to seem to deny their joint name. "'Ampstead!" he said, looking down very serenely on the lady, and then moved on, not wasting another word.

"I knew all along they were something out of the common way," said Mrs. Demijohn as soon as her niece came in.

"You haven't found out who it is, aunt?"

"You've been with Mrs. Duffer, I suppose. You two'd put your heads together for a week, and then would know nothing." It was not till quite the last thing at night that she told her secret. "He was a peer! He was Lord 'Ampstead!"

"A peer!"

"He was Lord 'Ampstead, I tell you," said Mrs. Demijohn.

"I don't believe there is such a lord," said Clara, as she took herself up to bed.

CHAPTER VII. THE POST OFFICE.

WHEN George Roden came home that evening the matter was discussed between him and his mother at great length. She was eager with him, if not to abandon his love, at any rate to understand how impossible it was that he should marry Lady Frances. She was very tender with him, full of feeling, full of compassion and sympathy; but she was persistent in declaring that no good could come from such an engagement. But he would not be deterred in the least from his resolution, nor would he accept it as possible that he should be turned from his object by the wishes of any person as long as Lady Frances was true to him. "You speak as if daughters were slaves," he said.

"So they are. So women must be;—slaves to the conventions of the world. A young woman can hardly run counter to her family on a question of marriage. She may be persistent enough to overcome objections, but that will be because the objections themselves are not strong enough to stand against her. But here the objections will be very strong."

"We will see, mother," he said. She who knew him well perceived that it would be vain to talk to him further.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I will go out to Hendon, perhaps on Sunday. That Mr. Vivian is a pleasant fellow, and

as Hampstead does not wish to quarrel with me I certainly will not quarrel with him."

Roden was generally popular at his office, and had contrived to make his occupation there pleasant to himself and interesting; but he had his little troubles, as will happen to most men in all walks of life. His came to him chiefly from the ill-manners of a fellow-clerk who sat in the same room with him, and at the same desk. There were five who occupied the apartment, an elderly gentleman and four youngsters. The elderly gentleman was a quiet, civil, dull old man, who never made himself disagreeable, and was content to put up with the frivolities of youth, if they did not become too uproarious or antagonistic to discipline. When they did, he had but one word of rebuke. "Mr. Crocker, I will not have it." Beyond that he had never been known to go in the way either of reporting the misconduct of his subordinates to other superior powers, or in quarrelling with the young men himself. Even with Mr. Crocker, who no doubt was troublesome, he contrived to maintain terms of outward friendship. His name was Jerningham, and next to Mr. Jerningham in age came Mr. Crocker, by whose ill-timed witticisms our George Roden was not unfrequently made to suffer. This had sometimes gone so far that Roden had contemplated the necessity of desiring Mr. Crocker to assume that a bond of enmity had been established between them;—or in other words, that they were not "to speak" except on official subjects. But there had been an air of importance about such a proceeding of which Crocker hardly seemed to be worthy; and Roden had abstained, putting off the evil hour from day to day, but still conscious that he must do something to stop vulgarities which were distasteful to him.

The two other young men, Mr. Bobbin and Mr.

Geraghty, who sat at a table by themselves and were the two junior clerks in that branch of the office, were pleasant and good-humoured enough. They were both young, and as yet not very useful to the Queen. They were apt to come late to their office, and impatient to leave it when the hour of four drew nigh. There would sometimes come a storm through the Department, moved by an unseen but powerful and unsatisfied Æolus, in which Bobbin and Geraghty would be threatened to be blown into infinite space. Minutes would be written and rumours spread about; punishments would be inflicted, and it would be given to be understood that now one and then the other would certainly have to return to his disconsolate family at the very next offence. There was a question at this very moment whether Geraghty, who had come from the sister island about twelve months since, should not be returned to King's County. No doubt he had passed the Civil Service examiners with distinguished applause; but Æolus hated the young Crichtons who came to him with full marks, and had declared that Geraghty, though no doubt a linguist, a philosopher, and a mathematician, was not worth his salt as a Post Office clerk. But he, and Bobbin also, were protected by Mr. Jerningham, and were well liked by George Roden.

That Roden was intimate with Lord Hampstead had become known to his fellow-clerks. The knowledge of this association acted somewhat to his advantage and somewhat to his injury. His daily companions could not but feel a reflected honour in their own intimacy with the friend of the eldest son of a Marquis, and were anxious to stand well with one who lived in such high society. Such was natural;—but it was natural also that envy should show itself in ridicule, and that the lord

should be thrown in the clerk's teeth when the clerk should be deemed to have given offence. Crocker, when it first became certain that Roden passed much of his time in company with a young lord, had been anxious enough to foregather with the fortunate youth who sat opposite to him; but Roden had not cared much for Crocker's society, and hence it had come to pass that Crocker had devoted himself to jeers and witticisms. Mr. Jerningham, who in his very soul respected a Marquis, and felt something of genuine awe for anything that touched the peerage, held his fortunate junior in unfeigned esteem from the moment in which he became aware of the intimacy. He did in truth think better of the clerk because the clerk had known how to make himself a companion to a lord. He did not want anything for himself. He was too old and settled in life to be desirous of new friendships. He was naturally conscientious, gentle, and unassuming. But Roden rose in his estimation, and Crocker fell, when he became assured that Roden and Lord Hampstead were intimate friends, and that Crocker had dared to jeer at the friendship. A lord is like a new hat. The one on the arm the other on the head are no evidences of mental superiority. But yet they are taken, and not incorrectly taken, as signs of merit. The increased esteem shown by Mr. Jerningham for Roden should, I think, be taken as showing Mr. Jerningham's good sense and general appreciation.

The two lads were both on Roden's side. Roden was not a rose, but he lived with a rose, and the lads of course liked the scent of roses. They did not particularly like Crocker, though Crocker had a dash about him which would sometimes win their flattery. Crocker was brave and impudent and self-assuming. They were

not as yet sufficiently advanced in life to be able to despise Crocker. Crocker imposed upon them. But should there come anything of real warfare between Crocker and Roden, there could be no doubt but that they would side with Lord Hampstead's friend. Such was the state of the room at the Post Office when Crocker entered it, on the morning of Lord Hampstead's visit to Paradise Row.

Crocker was a little late. He was often a little late, —a fact of which Mr. Jerningham ought to have taken more stringent notice than he did. Perhaps Mr. Jerningham rather feared Crocker. Crocker had so read Mr. Jerningham's character as to have become aware that his senior was soft, and perhaps timid. He had so far advanced in this reading as to have learned to think that he could get the better of Mr. Jerningham by being loud and impudent. He had no doubt hitherto been successful, but there were those in the office who believed that the day might come when Mr. Jerningham would rouse himself in his wrath.

"Mr. Crocker, you are late," said Mr. Jerningham.

"Mr. Jerningham, I am late. I scorn false excuses. Geraghty would say that his watch was wrong. Bobbin would have eaten something that had disagreed with him. Roden would have been detained by his friend, Lord Hampstead." To this Roden made no reply even by a look. "For me, I have to acknowledge that I did not turn out when I was called. Of twenty minutes I have deprived my country; but as my country values so much of my time at only seven-pence-halfpenny, it is hardly worth saying much about it."

"You are frequently late."

"When the amount has come up to ten pound I will send the Postmaster-General stamps to that amount."

He was now standing at his desk, opposite to Roden, to whom he made a low bow. "Mr. George Roden," he said, "I hope that his lordship is quite well."

"The only lord with whom I am acquainted is quite well; but I do not know why you should trouble yourself about him."

"I think it becoming in one who takes the Queen's pay to show a becoming anxiety as to the Queen's aristocracy. I have the greatest respect for the Marquis of Kingsbury. Have not you, Mr. Jerningham?"

"Certainly I have. But if you would go to your work instead of talking so much it would be better for everybody."

"I am at my work already. Do you think that I cannot work and talk at the same time? Bobbin, my boy, if you would open that window, do you think it would hurt your complexion?" Bobbin opened the window. "Paddy, where were you last night?" Paddy was Mr. Geraghty.

"I was dining, then, with my sister's mother-in-law."

"What,—the O'Kelly, the great legislator and Home Ruler, whom his country so loves and Parliament so hates! I don't think any Home Ruler's relative ought to be allowed into the service. Do you, Mr. Jerningham?"

"I think Mr. Geraghty, if he will only be a little more careful, will do great credit to the service," said Mr. Jerningham.

"I hope that Æolus may think the same." Æolus was the name by which a certain pundit was known at the office;—a violent and imperious Secretary, but not in the main ill-natured. "Æolus, when last I heard of his opinion, seemed to have his doubts about poor Paddy." This was a disagreeable subject, and it was felt by them all that it might better be left in silence. From that

time the work of the day was continued with no more than moderate interruptions till the hour of luncheon, when the usual attendant entered with the usual mutton-chops. "I wonder if Lord Hampstead has mutton-chops for luncheon?" asked Crocker.

"Why should he not?" asked Mr. Jermyingham foolishly.

"There must be some kind of gilded cutlet, upon which the higher members of the aristocracy regale themselves. I suppose, Roden, you must have seen his lordship at lunch."

"I dare say I have," said Roden, angrily. He knew that he was annoyed, and was angry with himself at his own annoyance.

"Are they golden or only gilded?" asked Crocker.

"I believe you mean to make yourself disagreeable," said the other.

"Quite the reverse. I mean to make myself agreeable;—only you have soared so high of late that ordinary conversation has no charms for you. Is there any reason why Lord Hampstead's lunch should not be mentioned?"

"Certainly there is," said Roden.

"Then, upon my life, I cannot see it. If you talked of my mid-day chop I should not take it amiss."

"I don't think a fellow should ever talk about another fellow's eating unless he knows the fellow." This came from Bobbin, who intended it well, meaning to fight the battle for Roden as well as he knew how.

"Most sapient Bobb," said Crocker, "you seem to be unaware that one young fellow, who is Roden, happens to be the peculiarly intimate friend of the other fellow, who is the Earl of Hampstead. Therefore the law, as so clearly laid down by yourself, has not been infringed. To return to our muttons, as the Frenchman says, what sort of lunch does his lordship eat?"

"You are determined to make yourself disagreeable," said Roden.

"I appeal to Mr. Jerningham whether I have said anything unbecoming."

"If you appeal to me, I think you have," said Mr. Jerningham.

"You have, at any rate, been so successful in doing it," continued Roden, "that I must ask you to hold your tongue about Lord Hampstead. It has not been by anything I have said that you have heard of my acquaintance with him. The joke is a bad one, and will become vulgar if repeated.

"Vulgar!" cried Crocker, pushing away his plate, and rising from his chair.

"I mean ungentlemanlike. I don't want to use hard words, but I will not allow myself to be annoyed."

"Hoity, toity," said Crocker, "here's a row because I made a chance allusion to a noble lord. I am to be called vulgar because I mentioned his name." Then he began to whistle.

"Mr. Crocker, I will not have it," said Mr. Jerningham, assuming his most angry tone. "You make more noise in the room than all the others put together."

"Nevertheless, I do wonder what Lord Hampstead has had for his lunch." This was the last shot, and after that the five gentlemen did in truth settle down to their afternoon's work.

When four o'clock came Mr. Jerningham with praiseworthy punctuality took his hat and departed. His wife and three unmarried daughters were waiting for him at Islington, and as he was always in his seat punctually at ten, he was justified in leaving it punctually at four. Crocker swaggered about the room for a minute or two with his hat on, desirous of showing that he was by no

means affected by the rebukes which he had received. But he, too, soon went, not having summoned courage to recur to the name of Roden's noble friend. The two lads remained for the sake of saying a word of comfort to Roden, who still sat writing at his desk. "I thought it was very low form," said Bobbin; "Crocker going on like that."

"Crocker's a baist," said Geraghty.

"What was it to him what anybody eats for his lunch?" continued Bobbin.

"Only he likes to have a nobleman's name in his mouth," said Geraghty. "I think it's the hoighth of bad manners talking about anybody's friends unless you happen to know them yourself."

"I think it is," said Roden, looking up from his desk. "But I'll tell you what shows worse manners;—that is, a desire to annoy anybody. Crocker likes to be funny, and he thinks there is no fun so good as what he calls taking a rise. I don't know that I'm very fond of Crocker, but it may be as well that we should all think no more about it." Upon this the young men promised that they, at least, would think no more about it, and then took their departure. George Roden soon followed them, for it was not the practice of anybody in that department to remain at work long after four o'clock.

Roden as he walked home did think more of the little affair than it deserved,—more at least than he would acknowledge that it deserved. He was angry with himself for bearing it in mind, and yet he did bear it in mind. Could it be that a creature so insignificant as Crocker could annoy him by a mere word or two? But he was annoyed, and did not know how such annoyance could be made to cease. If the man would continue to talk about Lord Hampstead there was no-

thing by which he could be made to hold his tongue. He could not be kicked, or beaten, or turned out of the room. For any purpose of real assistance Mr. Jerningham was useless. As to complaining to the *Æolus* of the office that a certain clerk would talk about Lord Hampstead, that of course was out of the question. He had already used strong language, calling the man vulgar and ungentlemanlike, but if a man does not regard strong language what further can an angry victim do to him?

Then his thoughts passed on to his connexion with the Marquis of Kingsbury's family generally. Had he not done wrong, at any rate, done foolishly, in thus moving himself out of his own sphere? At the present moment Lady Frances was nearer to him even than Lord Hampstead,—was more important to him and more in his thoughts. Was it not certain that he would give rise to misery rather than to happiness by what had occurred between him and Lady Frances? Was it not probable that he had embittered for her all the life of the lady whom he loved? He had assumed an assured face and a confident smile while declaring to his mother that no power on earth should stand between him and his promised wife,—that she would be able to walk out from her father's hall and marry him as certainly as might the housemaid or the ploughman's daughter go to her lover. But what would be achieved by that if she were to walk out only to encounter misery? The country was so constituted that he and these 'Traffords were in truth of a different race; as much so as the negro is different from the white man. The Post Office clerk may, indeed, possibly become a Duke; whereas the negro's skin cannot be washed white. But while he and Lady Frances were as they were, the distance between them was so great that no approach could be made between them

without disruption. The world might be wrong in this. To his thinking the world was wrong. But while the facts existed they were too strong to be set aside. He could do his duty to the world by struggling to propagate his own opinions, so that the distance might be a little lessened in his own time. He was sure that the distance was being lessened, and with this he thought that he ought to have been contented. The jeering of such a one as Crocker was unimportant though disagreeable, but it sufficed to show the feeling. Such a friendship as his with Lord Hampstead had appeared to Crocker to be ridiculous. Crocker would not have seen the absurdity unless others had seen it also. Even his own mother saw it. Here in England it was accounted so foolish a thing that he, a Post Office clerk, should be hand and glove with such a one as Lord Hampstead, that even a Crocker could raise a laugh against him! What would the world say when it should have become known that he intended to lead Lady Frances to the "hymeneal altar?" As he repeated the words to himself there was something ridiculous even to himself in the idea that the hymeneal altar should ever be mentioned in reference to the adventures of such a person as George Roden, the Post Office clerk. Thinking of all this, he was not in a happy frame of mind when he reached his home in Paradise Row.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. GREENWOOD.

RODEN spent a pleasant evening with his friend and his friend's friend at Hendon Hall before their departure for the yacht,—during which not a word was said or an

allusion made to Lady Frances. The day was Sunday, July 20th. The weather was very hot, and the two young men were delighted at the idea of getting away to the cool breezes of the Northern Seas. Vivian also was a clerk in the public service, but he was a clerk very far removed in his position from that filled by George Roden. He was attached to the Foreign Office, and was Junior Private Secretary to Lord Persiflage, who was Secretary of State at that moment. Lord Persiflage and our Marquis had married sisters. Vivian was distantly related to the two ladies, and hence the young men had become friends. As Lord Hampstead and Roden had been drawn together by similarity of opinion, so had Lord Hampstead and Vivian by the reverse. Hampstead could always produce Vivian in proof that he was not, in truth, opposed to his own order. Vivian was one who proclaimed his great liking for things as he found them. It was a thousand pities that any one should be hungry; but, for himself, he liked truffles, ortolans, and all good things. If there was any injustice in the world he was not responsible. And if there was any injustice he had not been the gainer, seeing that he was a younger brother. To him all Hampstead's theories were sheer rhodomontade. There was the world, and men had got to live in it as best they might. He intended to do so, and as he liked yachting and liked grouse-shooting, he was very glad to have arranged with Lord Persiflage and his brother Private Secretary, so as to be able to get out of town for the next two months. He was member of half-a-dozen clubs, could always go to his brother's country house if nothing more inviting offered, dined out in London four or five days a week, and considered himself a thoroughly useful member of society in that he condescended to write letters for Lord Persiflage. He was

pleasant in his manners to all men, and had accommodated himself to Roden as well as though Roden's office had also been in Downing Street instead of the City.

"Yes, grouse," he said, after dinner. "If anything better can be invented I'll go and do it. American bears are a myth. You may get one in three years, and, as far as I can hear, very poor fun it is when you get it. Lions are a grind. Elephants are as big as a hay-stack. Pig-sticking may be very well, but you've got to go to India, and if you're a poor Foreign Office clerk you haven't got either the time or the money."

"You speak as though killing something were a necessity," said Roden.

"So it is, unless somebody can invent something better. I hate races, where a fellow has nothing to do with himself when he can't afford to bet. I don't mean to take to cards for the next ten years. I have never been up in a balloon. Spooning is good fun, but it comes to an end so soon one way or another. Girls are so wide-awake that they won't spoon for nothing. Upon the whole I don't see what a fellow is to do unless he kills something."

"You won't have much to kill on board the yacht," said Roden.

"Fishing without end in Iceland and Norway! I knew a man who killed a ton of trout out of an Iceland lake. He had to pack himself up very closely in tight-fitting nets, or the midges would have eaten him. And the skin came off his nose and ears from the sun. But he liked that rather than not, and he killed his ton of trout."

"Who weighed them?" asked Hampstead.

"How well you may know a Utilitarian by the nature of his questions! If a man doesn't kill his ton all out, he can say he did, which is the next best thing to it."

"Are you taking close-packing nets with you?" Roden asked.

"Well, no. Hampstead would be too impatient. And the *Free Trader* isn't big enough to bring away the fish. But I don't mind betting a sovereign that I kill something every day I'm out,—barring Sundays."

Not a word was said about Lady Frances, although there were a few moments in which Roden and Lord Hampstead were alone together. Roden had made up his mind that he would ask no questions unless the subject were mentioned, and did not even allude to any of the family; but he learnt in the course of the evening that the Marquis had come back from Germany with the intention of attending to his Parliamentary duties during the remainder of the Session.

"He's going to turn us all out," said Vivian, "on the County Franchise, I suppose."

"I'm afraid my father is not so keen about County Franchise as he used to be, though I hope he will be one of the few to support it in the House of Lords if the House of Commons ever dares to pass it."

In this way Roden learnt that the Marquis, who had carried his daughter off to Saxony as soon as he had heard of the engagement, had left his charge there and had returned to London. As he went home that evening he thought that it would be his duty to go to Lord Kingsbury, and tell him, as from himself, that which the father had as yet only learnt from his daughter or from his wife. He was aware that it behoves a man when he has won a girl's heart to go to the father and ask permission to carry on his suit. This duty he thought he was bound to perform, even though the father were a person so high and mighty as the Marquis of Kingsbury. Hitherto any such going was out of his

power. The Marquis had heard the tidings, and had immediately caught his daughter up and carried her off to Germany. It would have been possible to write to him, but Roden had thought that not in such a way should such a duty be performed. Now the Marquis had come back to London; and though the operation would be painful the duty seemed to be paramount. On the next day he informed Mr. Jerningham that private business of importance would take him to the West End, and asked leave to absent himself. The morning had been passed in the room at the Post Office with more than ordinary silence. Crocker had been collecting himself for an attack, but his courage had hitherto failed him. As Roden put on his hat and opened the door he fired a parting shot. "Remember me kindly to Lord Hampstead," he said; "and tell him I hope he enjoyed his cutlets."

Roden stood for a moment with the door in his hand, thinking that he would turn upon the man and rebuke his insolence, but at last determined that it would be best to hold his peace.

He went direct to Park Lane, thinking that he would probably find the Marquis before he left the house after his luncheon. He had never been before at the town mansion which was known as Kingsbury House, and which possessed all the appanages of grandeur which can be given to a London residence. As he knocked at the door he acknowledged that he was struck with a certain awe of which he was ashamed. Having said so much to the daughter, surely he should not be afraid to speak to the father! But he felt that he could have managed the matter much better had he contrived to have the interview at Hendon Hall, which was much less grand than Kingsbury House. Almost as soon as

he knocked the door was opened, and he found himself with a powdered footman as well as the porter. The powdered footman did not know whether or no "my lord" was at home. He would inquire. Would the gentleman sit down for a minute or two? The gentleman did sit down, and waited for what seemed to him to be more than half-an-hour. The house must be very large indeed if it took the man all this time to look for the Marquis. He was beginning to think in what way he might best make his escape,—as a man is apt to think when delays of this kind prove too long for the patience,—but the man returned, and with a cold unfriendly air bade Roden to follow him. Roden was quite sure that some evil was to happen, so cold and unfriendly was the manner of the man; but still he followed, having now no means of escape. The man had not said that the Marquis would see him, had not even given any intimation that the Marquis was in the house. It was as though he were being led away to execution for having had the impertinence to knock at the door. But still he followed. He was taken along a passage on the ground floor, past numerous doors, to what must have been the back of the house, and there was shown into a somewhat dingy room that was altogether surrounded by books. There he saw an old gentleman;—but the old gentleman was not the Marquis of Kingsbury.

"Ah, eh, oh," said the old gentleman. "You, I believe, are Mr. George Roden."

"That is my name. I had hoped to see Lord Kingsbury."

"Lord Kingsbury has thought it best for all parties that,—that,—that,—I should see you. That is, if anybody should see you. My name is Greenwood;—the Rev. Mr. Greenwood, I am his lordship's chaplain,

and, if I may presume to say so, his most attached and sincere friend. I have had the honour of a very long connexion with his lordship, and have therefore been entrusted by him with this,—this—this delicate duty, I had perhaps better call it." Mr. Greenwood was a stout, short man, about sixty years of age, with pendant cheeks, and pendant chin, with a few grey hairs brushed carefully over his head, with a good forehead and well-fashioned nose, who must have been good-looking when he was young, but that he was too short for manly beauty. Now, in advanced years, he had become lethargic and averse to exercise; and having grown to be corpulent he had lost whatever he had possessed in height by becoming broad, and looked to be a fat dwarf. Still there would have been something pleasant in his face but for an air of doubt and hesitation which seemed almost to betray cowardice. At the present moment he stood in the middle of the room rubbing his hands together, and almost trembling as he explained to George Roden who he was.

"I had certainly wished to see his lordship himself," said Roden.

"The Marquis has thought it better not, and I must say that I agree with the Marquis." At the moment Roden hardly knew how to go on with the business in hand. "I believe I am justified in assuring you that anything you would have said to the Marquis you may say to me."

"Am I to understand that Lord Kingsbury refuses to see me?"

"Well;—yes. At the present crisis he does refuse. What can be gained?"

Roden did not as yet know how far he might go in mentioning the name of Lady Frances to the clergyman,

but was unwilling to leave the house without some reference to the business he had in hand. He was peculiarly averse to leaving an impression that he was afraid to mention what he had done. "I had to speak to his lordship about his daughter," he said.

"I know; I know; Lady Frances! I have known Lady Frances since she was a little child. I have the warmest regard for Lady Frances,—as I have also for Lord Hampstead,—and for the Marchioness, and for her three dear little boys, Lord Frederic, Lord Augustus, and Lord Gregory. I feel a natural hesitation in calling them my friends because I think that the difference in rank and station which it has pleased the Lord to institute should be maintained with all their privileges and all their honours. Though I have agreed with the Marquis through a long life in those political tenets by propagating which he has been ever anxious to improve the condition of the lower classes, I am not and have not been on that account less anxious to uphold by any small means which may be in my power those variations in rank, to which, I think, in conjunction with the Protestant religion, the welfare and high standing of this country are mainly to be attributed. Having these feelings at my heart very strongly I do not wish, particularly on such an occasion as this, to seem by even a chance word to diminish the respect which I feel to be due to all the members of a family of a rank so exalted as that which belongs to the family of the Marquis of Kingsbury. Putting that aside for a moment, I perhaps may venture on this occasion, having had confided to me a task so delicate as the present, to declare my warm friendship for all who bear the honoured name of Trafford. I am at any rate entitled to declare myself so far a friend, that you may say any-

thing on this delicate subject which you would think it necessary to say to the young lady's father. However inexpedient it may be that anything should be said at all, I have been instructed by his lordship to hear,—and to reply."

George Roden, while he was listening to this tedious sermon, was standing opposite to the preacher with his hat in his hand, having not yet had accorded to him the favour of a seat. During the preaching of the sermon the preacher had never ceased to shiver and shake, rubbing one fat little clammy hand slowly over the other, and apparently afraid to look his audience in the face. It seemed to Roden as though the words must have been learnt by heart, they came so glibly, with so much of unction and of earnestness, and were in their glibness so strongly opposed to the man's manner. There had not been a single word spoken that had not been offensive to Roden. It seemed to him that they had been chosen because of their offence. In all those long-winded sentences about rank in which Mr. Greenwood had expressed his own humility and insufficiency for the position of friend in a family so exalted he had manifestly intended to signify the much more manifest insufficiency of his hearer to fill a place of higher honour even than that of friend. Had the words come at the spur of the moment, the man must, thought Roden, have great gifts for extempore preaching. He had thought the time in the hall to be long, but it had not been much for the communication of the Earl's wishes, and then for the preparation of all these words. It was necessary, however, that he must make his reply without any preparation.

"I have come," he said, "to tell Lord Kingsbury that I am in love with his daughter." At hearing this the fat little man held up both his hands in amazement,—

although he had already made it clear that he was acquainted with all the circumstances. "And I should have been bound to add," said Roden, plucking up all his courage, "that the young lady is also in love with me."

"Oh,—oh,—oh!" The hands went higher and higher as these interjections were made.

"Why not? Is not the truth the best?"

"A young man, Mr. Roden, should never boast of a young lady's affection,—particularly of such a young lady;—particularly when I cannot admit that it exists;—particularly not in her father's house."

"Nobody should boast of anything, Mr. Greenwood. I speak of a fact which it is necessary that a father should know. If the lady denies the assertion I have done."

"It is a matter in which delicacy demands that no question shall be put to the young lady. After what has occurred, it is out of the question that your name should even be mentioned in the young lady's hearing."

"Why?—I mean to marry her."

"Mean!" this word was shouted in the extremity of Mr. Greenwood's horror. "Mr. Roden, it is my duty to assure you that under no circumstances can you ever see the young lady again."

"Who says so?"

"The Marquis says so,—and the Marchioness,—and her little brothers, who with their growing strength will protect her from all harm."

"I hope their growing strength may not be wanted for any such purpose. Should it be so I am sure they will not be deficient as brothers. At present there could not be much for them to do." Mr. Greenwood shook his head. He was still standing, not having moved an

inch from the position in which he had been placed when the door was opened. "I can understand, Mr. Greenwood, that any further conversation on the subject between you and me must be quite useless."

"Quite useless," said Mr. Greenwood.

"But it has been necessary for my honour, and for my purpose, that Lord Kingsbury should know that I had come to ask him for his daughter's hand. I had not dared to expect that he would accept my proposal graciously."

"No, no; hardly that, Mr. Roden."

"But it was necessary that he should know my purpose from myself. He will now, no doubt, do so. He is, as I understand you, aware of my presence in the house." Mr. Greenwood shook his head, as though he would say that this was a matter he could not any longer discuss. "If not, I must trouble his lordship with a letter."

"That will be unnecessary."

"He does know." Mr. Greenwood nodded his head. "And you will tell him why I have come?"

"The Marquis shall be made acquainted with the nature of the interview."

Roden then turned to leave the room, but was obliged to ask Mr. Greenwood to show him the way along the passages. This the clergyman did, tripping on, ahead, upon his toes, till he had delivered the intruder over to the hall porter. Having done so, he made as it were a valedictory bow, and tripped back to his own apartment. Then Roden left the house, thinking as he did so that there was certainly much to be done before he could be received there as a welcome son-in-law.

As he made his way back to Holloway he again considered it all. How could there be an end to this,—an

end that would be satisfactory to himself and to the girl that he loved? The aversion expressed to him through the person of Mr. Greenwood was natural. It could not but be expected that such a one as the Marquis of Kingsbury should endeavour to keep his daughter out of the hands of such a suitor. If it were only in regard to money would it not be necessary for him to do so? Every possible barricade would be built up in his way. There would be nothing on his side except the girl's love for himself. Was it to be expected that her love would have power to conquer such obstacles as these? And if it were, would she obtain her own happiness by clinging to it? He was aware that in his present position no duty was so incumbent on him as that of looking to the happiness of the woman whom he wished to make his wife.

CHAPTER IX.

AT KÖNIGSGRAAF.

VERY shortly after this there came a letter from Lady Frances to Paradise Row,—the only letter which Roden received from her during this period of his courtship. A portion of the letter shall be given, from which the reader will see that difficulties had arisen at Königsgraaf as to their correspondence. He had written twice. The first letter had in due course reached the young lady's hands, having been brought up from the village post-office in the usual manner, and delivered to her without remark by her own maid. When the second reached the Castle it fell into the hands of the Marchioness. She had, indeed, taken steps that it should fall into her hands. She was aware that the first letter had

come, and had been shocked at the idea of such a correspondence. She had received no direct authority from her husband on the subject, but felt that it was incumbent on herself to take strong steps. It must not be that Lady Frances should receive love-letters from a Post Office clerk! As regarded Lady Frances herself, the Marchioness would have been willing enough that the girl should be given over to a letter-carrier, if she could be thus got rid of altogether,—so that the world should not know that there was or had been a Lady Frances. But the fact was patent,—as was also that too, too sad truth of the existence of a brother older than her own comely bairns. As the feeling of hatred grew upon her, she continually declared to herself that she would have been as gentle a stepmother as ever loved another woman's children, had these two known how to bear themselves like the son and daughter of a Marquis. Seeing what they were,—and what were her own children,—how these struggled to repudiate that rank which her own were born to adorn and protect, was it not natural that she should hate them, and profess that she should wish them to be out of the way? They could not be made to get out of the way, but Lady Frances might at any rate be repressed. Therefore she determined to stop the correspondence.

She did stop the second letter,—and told her daughter that she had done so.

“Papa didn't say I wasn't to have my letters,” pleaded Lady Frances.

“Your papa did not suppose for a moment that you would submit to anything so indecent.”

“It is not indecent.”

“I shall make myself the judge of that. You are now in my care. Your papa can do as he likes when

he comes back." There was a long altercation, but it ended in victory on the part of the Marchioness. The young lady, when she was told that, if necessary, the post-mistress in the village should be instructed not to send on any letter addressed to George Roden, believed in the potency of the threat. She felt sure also that she would be unable to get at any letters addressed to herself if the quasi-parental authority of the Marchioness were used to prevent it. She yielded, on the condition, however, that one letter should be sent; and the Marchioness, not at all thinking that her own instructions would have prevailed with the post-mistress, yielded so far.

The tenderness of the letter readers can appreciate and understand without seeing it expressed in words. It was very tender, full of promises, and full of trust. Then came the short passage in which her own uncomfortable position was explained;—

"You will understand that there has come one letter which I have not been allowed to see. Whether mamma has opened it I do not know, or whether she has destroyed it. Though I have not seen it, I take it as an assurance of your goodness and truth. But it will be useless for you to write more till you hear from me again; and I have promised that this, for the present, shall be my last to you. 'The last and the first! I hope you will keep it till you have another, in order that you may have something to tell you how well I love you.'" As she sent it from her she did not know how much of solace there was even in the writing of a letter to him she loved, nor had she as yet felt how great was the torment of remaining without palpable notice from him she loved.

After the episode of the letter life at Königsgraaf was very bitter and very dull. But few words were

spoken between the Marchioness and her stepdaughter, and those were never friendly in their tone or kindly in their nature. Even the children were taken out of their sister's way as much as possible, so that their morals should not be corrupted by evil communication. When she complained of this to their mother the Marchioness merely drew herself up and was silent. Were it possible she would have altogether separated her darlings from contact with their sister, not because she thought that the darlings would in truth be injured,—as to which she had no fears at all, seeing that the darlings were subject to her own influences,—but in order that the punishment to Lady Frances might be the more complete. The circumstances being such as they were, there should be no family love, no fraternal sports, no softnesses, no mercy. There must, she thought, have come from the blood of that first wife a stain of impurity which had made her children altogether unfit for the rank to which they had unfortunately been born. This iniquity on the part of Lady Frances, this disgrace which made her absolutely tremble as she thought of it, this abominable affection for an inferior creature, acerbated her feelings even against Lord Hampstead. The two were altogether so base as to make her think that they could not be intended by Divine Providence to stand permanently in the way of the glory of the family. Something certainly would happen. It would turn out that they were not truly the legitimate children of a real Marchioness. Some beautiful scheme of romance would discover itself to save her and her darlings, and all the Traffords and all the Montressors from the terrible abomination with which they were threatened by these interlopers. The idea dwelt in her mind till it became an almost fixed conviction that Lord Frederic

would live to become Lord Hampstead,—or probably Lord Highgate, as there was a third title in the family, and the name of Hampstead must for a time be held to have been disgraced,—and in due course of happy time Marquis of Kingsbury. Hitherto she had been accustomed to speak to her own babies of their elder brother with something of that respect which was due to the future head of the family; but in these days she altered her tone when they spoke to her of Jack, as they would call him, and she, from herself, never mentioned his name to them. “Is Fanny naughty?” Lord Frederic asked one day. To this she made no reply. “Is Fanny very naughty?” the boy persisted in asking. To this she nodded her head solemnly. “What has Fanny done, mamma?” At this she shook her head mysteriously. It may, therefore, be understood that poor Lady Frances was sadly in want of comfort during the sojourn at Königsgraaf.

About the end of August the Marquis returned. He had hung on in London till the very last days of the Session had been enjoyed, and had then pretended that his presence had been absolutely required at Trafford Park. To Trafford Park he went, and had spent ten miserable days alone. Mr. Greenwood had indeed gone with him; but the Marquis was a man who was miserable unless surrounded by the comforts of his family, and he led Mr. Greenwood such a life that that worthy clergyman was very happy when he was left altogether in solitude by his noble friend. Then, in compliance with the promise which he had absolutely made, and aware that it was his duty to look after his wicked daughter, the Marquis returned to Königsgraaf. Lady Frances was to him at this period of his life a cause of unmitigated trouble. It must not

be supposed that his feelings were in any way akin to those of the Marchioness as to either of his elder children. Both of them were very dear to him, and of both of them he was in some degree proud. They were handsome, noble-looking, clever, and to himself thoroughly well-behaved. He had seen what trouble other elder sons could give their fathers, what demands were made for increased allowances, what disreputable pursuits were sometimes followed, what quarrels there were, what differences, what want of affection and want of respect! He was wise enough to have perceived all this, and to be aware that he was in some respects singularly blest. Hampstead never asked him for a shilling. He was a liberal man, and would willingly have given many shillings. But still there was a comfort in having a son who was quite contented in having his own income. No doubt a time would come when those little lords would want shillings. And Lady Frances had always been particularly soft to him, diffusing over his life a sweet taste of the memory of his first wife. Of the present Marchioness he was fond enough, and was aware how much she did for him to support his position. But he was conscious ever of a prior existence in which there had been higher thoughts, grander feelings, and aspirations which were now wanting to him. Of these something would come back in the moments which he spent with his daughter; and in this way she was very dear to him. But now there had come a trouble which robbed his life of all its sweetness. He must go back to the grandeur of his wife and reject the tenderness of his daughter. During these days at Trafford he made himself very unpleasant to the devoted friend who had always been so true to his interests.

When the battle about the correspondence was explained to him by his wife, it, of course, became necessary to him to give his orders to his daughter. Such a matter could hardly be passed over in silence,—though he probably might have done so had he not been instigated to action by the Marchioness.

“Fanny,” he said, “I have been shocked by these letters.”

“I only wrote one, papa.”

“Well, one. But two came.”

“I only had one, papa.”

“That made two. But there should have been no letter at all. Do you think it proper that a young lady should correspond with,—with,—a gentleman in opposition to the wishes of her father and mother?”

“I don’t know, papa.”

This seemed to him so weak that the Marquis took heart of grace, and made the oration which he felt that he as a father was bound to utter upon the entire question. For, after all, it was not the letters which were of importance, but the resolute feeling which had given birth to the letters. “My dear, this is a most unfortunate affair.” He paused for a reply; but Lady Frances felt that the assertion was one to which at the present moment she could make no reply. “It is, you know, quite out of the question that you should marry a young man so altogether unfitted for you in point of station as this young man.”

“But I shall, papa.”

“Fanny, you can do no such thing.”

“I certainly shall. It may be a very long time first; but I certainly shall,—unless I die.”

“It is wicked of you, my dear, to talk of dying in that way.”

“What I mean is, that however long I may live I shall consider myself engaged to Mr. Roden.”

“He has behaved very, very badly. He has made his way into my house under a false pretence.”

“He came as Hampstead’s friend.”

“It was very foolish of Hampstead to bring him,—very foolish,—a Post Office clerk.”

“Mr. Vivian is a clerk in the Foreign Office. Why shouldn’t one office be the same as another?”

“They are very different;—but Mr. Vivian wouldn’t think of such a thing. He understands the nature of things, and knows his own position. There is a conceit about the other man.”

“A man should be conceited, papa. Nobody will think well of him unless he thinks well of himself.”

“He came to me in Park Lane.”

“What! Mr. Roden?”

“Yes; he came. But I didn’t see him. Mr. Greenwood saw him.”

“What could Mr. Greenwood say to him?”

“Mr. Greenwood could tell him to leave the house,—and he did so. There was nothing more to tell him. Now, my dear, let there be no more about it. If you will put on your hat, we will get out and walk down to the village.”

To this Lady Frances gave a ready assent. She was not at all disposed to quarrel with her father, or to take in bad part what he had said about her lover. She had not expected that things would go very easily. She had promised to herself constancy and final success; but she had not expected that in her case the course of true love could be made to run smooth. She was quite willing to return to a condition of good humour with her father, and,—not exactly to drop her lover for the

moment,—but so to conduct herself as though he were not paramount in her thoughts. The cruelty of her stepmother had so weighed upon her that she found it to be quite a luxury to be allowed to walk with her father.

“I don’t know that anything can be done,” the Marquis said a few days afterwards to his wife. “It is one of those misfortunes which do happen now and again!”

“That such a one as your daughter should give herself up to a clerk in the Post Office!”

“What’s the use of repeating that so often? I don’t know that the Post Office is worse than anything else. Of course it can’t be allowed;—and having said so, the best thing will be to go on just as though nothing had happened.”

“And let her do just what she pleases?”

“Who’s going to let her do anything? She said she wouldn’t write, and she hasn’t written. We must just take her back to Trafford, and let her forget him as soon as she can.”

The Marchioness was by no means satisfied, though she did not know what measure of special severity to recommend. There was once a time,—a very good time, as Lady Kingsbury thought now,—in which a young lady could be locked up in a convent, or perhaps in a prison, or absolutely forced to marry some suitor whom her parents should find for her. But those comfortable days were past. In a prison Lady Frances was detained now; but it was a prison of which the Marchioness was forced to make herself the gaoler, and in which her darlings were made to be fellow-prisoners with their wicked sister. She herself was anxious to get back to Trafford and the comforts of her own home. The

beauties of Königsgraaf were not lovely to her in her present frame of mind. But how would it be if Lady Frances should jump out of the window at Trafford and run away with George Roden? The windows at Königsgraaf were certainly much higher than those at Trafford.

They had made up their mind to return early in September, and the excitement of packing up had almost commenced among them when Lord Hampstead suddenly appeared on the scene. He had had enough of yachting, and had grown tired of books and gardening at Hendon. Something must be done before the hunting began, and so, without notice, he appeared one day at Königsgraaf. This was to the intense delight of his brothers, over whose doings he assumed a power which their mother was unable to withstand. They were made to gallop on ponies on which they had only walked before; they were bathed in the river, and taken to the top of the Castle, and shut up in the dungeon after a fashion which was within the reach of no one but Hampstead. Jack was Jack, and all was delight, as far as the children were concerned; but the Marchioness was not so well pleased with the arrival. A few days after his coming a conversation arose as to Lady Frances which Lady Kingsbury would have avoided had it been possible, but it was forced upon her by her stepson.

"I don't think that Fanny ought to be bullied," said her stepson.

"Hampstead, I wish you would understand that I do not understand strong language."

"Teased, tormented, and made wretched."

"If she be wretched she has brought it on herself."

"But she is not to be treated as though she had disgraced herself."

"She has disgraced herself."

"I deny it. I will not hear such a word said of her even by you." The Marchioness drew herself up as though she had been insulted. "If there is to be such a feeling about her in your house I must ask my father to have her removed, and I will make a home for her. I will not see her broken-hearted by cruel treatment. I am sure that he would not wish it."

"You have no right to speak to me in this manner."

"I surely have a right to protect my sister, and I will exercise it."

"You have brought most improperly a young man into the house——"

"I have brought into the house a young man whom I am proud to call my friend."

"And now you mean to assist him in destroying your sister."

"You are very wrong to say so. They both know, Roden and my sister also, that I disapprove of this marriage. If Fanny were with me I should not think it right to ask Roden into the house. They would both understand that. But it does not follow that she should be cruelly used."

"No one has been cruel to her but she herself."

"It is easy enough to perceive what is going on. It will be much better that Fanny should remain with the family; but you may be sure of this,—that I will not see her tortured." Then he took himself off, and on the next day he had left Königsgraaf. It may be understood that the Marchioness was not reconciled to her radical stepson by such language as he had used to her. About a week afterwards the whole family returned to England and to Trafford.

CHAPTER X.

"NOBLESSE OBLIGE."

"I QUITE agree," said Hampstead, endeavouring to discuss the matter rationally with his sister, "that her ladyship should not be allowed to torment you."

"She does torment me. You cannot perceive what my life was at Königsgraaf! There is a kind of usage which would drive any girl to run away,—or to drown herself. I don't suppose a man can know what it is always to be frowned at. A man has his own friends, and can go anywhere. His spirits are not broken by being isolated. He would not even see half the things which a girl is made to feel. The very servants were encouraged to treat me badly. The boys were not allowed to come near me. I never heard a word that was not intended to be severe."

"I am sure it was bad."

"And it was not made better by the conviction that she has never cared for me. It is to suffer all the authority, but to enjoy none of the love of a mother. When papa came of course it was better; but even papa cannot make her change her ways. A man is comparatively so very little in the house. If it goes on it will drive me mad."

"Of course I'll stand to you."

"Oh, John, I am sure you will."

"But it isn't altogether easy to know how to set about it. If we were to keep house together at Hendon——" As he made this proposition a look of joy came over her face, and shone amidst her tears. "There would, of course, be a difficulty."

"What difficulty?" She, however, knew well what would be the difficulty.

"George Roden would be too near to us."

"I should never see him unless you approved.

"I should not approve. That would be the difficulty. He would argue the matter with me, and I should have to tell him that I could not let him come to the house, except with my father's leave. That would be out of the question. And therefore, as I say, there would be a difficulty."

"I would never see him,—except with your sanction,—nor write to him,—nor receive letters from him. You are not to suppose that I would give him up. I shall never do that. I shall go on and wait. When a girl has once brought herself to tell a man that she loves him, according to my idea she cannot give him up. There are things which cannot be changed. I could have lived very well without thinking of him had I not encouraged myself to love him. But I have done that, and now he must be everything to me."

"I am sorry that it should be so."

"It is so. But if you will take me to Hendon I will never see him till I have papa's leave. It is my duty to obey him,—but not her."

"I am not quite clear about that."

"She has rejected me as a daughter, and therefore I reject her as a mother. She would get rid of us both if she could."

"You should not attribute to her any such thoughts."

"If you saw her as often as I do you would know. She hates you almost as much as me,—though she cannot show it so easily."

"That she should hate my theories I can easily understand."

"You stand in her way."

"Of course I do. It is natural that a woman should wish to have the best for her own children. I have sometimes myself felt it to be a pity that Frederic should have an elder brother. Think what a gallant young Marquis he would make, while I am altogether out of my element."

"That is nonsense, John."

"I ought to have been a tailor. Tailors, I think, are generally the most ill-conditioned, sceptical, and patriotic of men. Had my natural propensities been sharpened by the difficulty of maintaining a wife and children upon seven and sixpence a day, I really think I could have done something to make myself conspicuous. As it is, I am neither one thing nor another; neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring. To the mind devoted to marquises I can understand that I should be a revolting being. I have no aptitudes for aristocratic prettinesses. Her ladyship has three sons, either of which would make a perfect marquis. How is it possible that she should not think that I am standing in her way?"

"But she knew of your existence when she married papa."

"No doubt she did;—but that does not alter her nature. I think I could find it in my heart to forgive her, even though she attempted to poison me, so much do I stand in her way. I have sometimes thought that I ought to repudiate myself; give up my prospects, and call myself John Trafford—so as to make way for her more lordly lordlings."

"That is nonsense, John."

"At any rate it is impossible. I could only do it by blowing my brains out—which would not be in ac-

cordance with my ideas of life. But you are not in anybody's way. There is nothing to be got by poisoning you. If she were to murder me there would be something reasonable in it,—something that one could pardon; but in torturing you she is instigated by a vile ambition. She is afraid, lest her own position should be tarnished by an inferior marriage on your part. There would be something noble in killing me for the sake of dear little Fred. She would be getting something for him who, of course, is most dear to her. But the other is the meanest vanity;—and I will not stand it.”

This conversation took place early in October, when they had been some weeks at Trafford Park. Hampstead had come and gone, as was his wont, never remaining there above two or three days at a time. Lord Kingsbury, who was ill at ease, had run hither and thither about the country, looking after this or the other property, and staying for a day or two with this or the other friend. The Marchioness had declined to invite any friends to the house, declaring to her husband that the family was made unfit for gaiety by the wicked conduct of ^his eldest daughter. There was no attempt at shooting the pheasants, or even preparing to shoot them, so great was the general depression. Mr. Greenwood was there, and was thrown into very close intercourse with her ladyship. Although he had always agreed with the Marquis,—as he had not forgotten to tell George Roden during that interview in London,—in regard to his lordship's early political tenets, nevertheless his mind was so constituted that he was quite at one with her ladyship as to the disgraceful horror of low associations for noble families. Not only did he sympathize as to the abomination of the Post Office clerk, but he sympathized also fully as to the

positive unfitness which Lord Hampstead displayed for that station in life to which he had been called. Mr. Greenwood would sigh and wheeze and groan when the future prospects of the House of Trafford were discussed between him and her ladyship. It might be, or it might not be, well,—so he kindly put it in talking to the Marchioness,—that a nobleman should indulge himself with liberal politics; but it was dreadful to think that the heir to a great title should condescend to opinions worthy of a radical tailor. For Mr. Greenwood agreed with Lord Hampstead about the tailor. Lord Hampstead seemed to him to be a matter simply for sorrow,—not for action. Nothing, he thought, could be done in regard to Lord Hampstead. Time,—time that destroys but which also cures so many things,—would no doubt have its effect; so that Lord Hampstead might in the fulness of years live to be as staunch a supporter of his class as any Duke or Marquis living. Or perhaps,—perhaps, it might be that the Lord would take him. Mr. Greenwood saw that this remark was more to the purpose, and at once went to work with the Peerage, and found a score of cases in which, within half-a-century, the second brother had risen to the title. It seemed, indeed, to be the case that a peculiar mortality attached itself to the eldest sons of Peers. This was comforting. But there was not in it so much ground for positive action as at the present moment existed in regard to Lady Frances. On this matter there was a complete unison of spirit between the two friends.

Mr. Greenwood had seen the objectionable young man, and could say how thoroughly objectionable he was at all points,—how vulgar, flippant, ignorant, impudent, exactly what a clerk in the Post Office might be expected to be. Any severity, according to Mr.

Greenwood, would be justified in keeping the two young persons apart. Gradually Mr. Greenwood learnt to talk of the female young person with very little of that respect which he showed to other members of the family. In this way her ladyship came to regard Lady Frances as though she were not Lady Frances at all,—as though she were some distant Fanny Trafford, a girl of bad taste and evil conduct, who had unfortunately been brought into the family on grounds of mistaken charity.

Things had so gone on at Trafford, that Trafford had hardly been preferable to Königsgraaf. Indeed, at Königsgraaf there had been no Mr. Greenwood, and Mr. Greenwood had certainly added much to the annoyances which poor Lady Frances was made to bear. In this condition of things she had written to her brother, begging him to come to her. He had come, and thus had taken place the conversation which has been given above.

On the same day Hampstead saw his father and discussed the matter with him;—that matter, and, as will be seen, some others also. “What on earth do you wish me to do about her?” asked the Marquis.

“Let her come and live with me at Hendon. If you will let me have the house I will take all the rest upon myself.”

“Keep an establishment of your own?”

“Why not? If I found I couldn’t afford it I’d give up the hunting and stick to the yacht.”

“It isn’t about money,” said the Marquis, shaking his head.

“Her ladyship never liked Hendon for herself.”

“Nor is it about the house. You might have the house and welcome. But how can I give up my charge over your sister just when I know that she is disposed to do just what she ought not.”

"She won't be a bit more likely to do it there than here," said the brother.

"He would be quite close to her."

"You may take this for granted, sir, that no two persons would be more thoroughly guided by a sense of duty than my sister and George Roden."

"Did she show her duty when she allowed herself to be engaged to a man like that without saying a word to any of her family?"

"She told her ladyship as soon as it occurred."

"She should not have allowed it to have occurred at all. It is nonsense talking like that. You cannot mean to say that such a girl as your sister is entitled to do what she likes with herself without consulting any of her family,—even to accepting such a man as this for her lover."

"I hardly know," said Hampstead, thoughtfully.

"You ought to know. I know. Everybody knows. It is nonsense talking like that."

"I doubt whether people do know," said Hampstead. "She is twenty-one, and as far as the law goes might, I believe, walk out of the house, and marry any man she pleases to-morrow. You as her father have no authority over her whatever;"—here the indignant father jumped up from his chair; but his son went on with his speech, as though determined not to be interrupted,—“except what may come to you by her good feeling, or else from the fact that she is dependent on you for her maintenance.”

"Good G——!" shouted the Marquis.

"I think this is about the truth of it. Young ladies do subject themselves to the authority of their parents from feeling, from love, and from dependence;

but, as far as I understand in the matter, they are not legally subject beyond a certain age."

"You'd talk the hind legs off a dog."

"I wish I could. But one may say a few words without being so eloquent as that. If such is the case I am not sure that Fanny has been morally wrong. She may have been foolish. I think she has been, because I feel that the marriage is not suitable for her."

"Noblesse oblige," said the Marquis, putting his hand upon his bosom.

"No doubt. Nobility, whatever may be its nature, imposes bonds on us. And if these bonds be not obeyed, then nobility ceases. But I deny that any nobility can bind us to any conduct which we believe to be wrong."

"Who has said that it does?"

"Nobility," continued the son, not regarding his father's question, "cannot bind me to do that which you or others think to be right, if I do not approve it myself."

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"You imply that because I belong to a certain order, —or my sister,—we are bound to those practices of life which that order regards with favour. This I deny both on her behalf and my own. I didn't make myself the eldest son of an English peer. I do acknowledge that as very much has been given to me in the way of education, of social advantages, and even of money, a higher line of conduct is justly demanded from me than from those who have been less gifted. So far, *noblesse oblige*. But before I undertake the duty thus imposed upon me, I must find out what is that higher line of conduct. Fanny should do the same. In marrying George Roden she would do better, according to your

maxim, than in giving herself to some noodle of a lord who from first to last will have nothing to be proud of beyond his acres and his title."

The Marquis had been walking about the room impatiently, while his didactic son was struggling to explain his own theory as to those words *noblesse oblige*. Nothing could so plainly express the feelings of the Marquis on the occasion as that illustration of his as to the dog's hind legs. But he was a little ashamed of it, and did not dare to use it twice on the same occasion. He fretted and fumed, and would have stopped Hampstead had it been possible; but Hampstead was irrepressible when he had become warm on his own themes, and his father knew that he must listen on to the bitter end. "I won't have her go to Hendon at all," he said, when his son had finished.

"Then you will understand little of her nature,—or of mine. Roden will not come near her there. I can hardly be sure that he will not do so here. Here Fanny will feel that she is being treated as an enemy."

"You have no right to say so."

"There she will know that you have done much to promote her happiness. I will give you my assurance that she will neither see him nor write to him. She has promised as much to me herself, and I can trust her."

"Why should she be so anxious to leave her natural home?"

"Because," said Hampstead boldly, "she has lost her natural mother." The Marquis frowned awfully at hearing this. "I have not a word to say against my step-mother as to myself. I will not accuse her of anything as to Fanny,—except that they thoroughly misunderstand each other. You must see it yourself, sir." The Marquis

had seen it very thoroughly. "And Mr. Greenwood has taken upon himself to speak to her,—which was, I think, very impertinent."

"I never authorized him."

"But he did. Her ladyship no doubt authorized him. The end of it is that Fanny is watched. Of course she will not bear a continuation of such misery. Why should she? It will be better that she should come to me than be driven to go off with her lover."

Before the week was over the Marquis had yielded. Hendon Hall was to be given up altogether to Lord Hampstead, and his sister was to be allowed to live with him as the mistress of his house. She was to come in the course of next month, and remain there at any rate till the spring. There would be a difficulty about the hunting, no doubt, but that Hampstead if necessary was prepared to abandon for the season. He thought that perhaps he might be able to run down twice a week to the Vale of Aylesbury, going across from Hendon to the Willesden Junction. He would at any rate make his sister's comfort the first object of his life, and would take care that in doing so George Roden should be excluded altogether from the arrangement.

The Marchioness was paralyzed when she heard that Lady Frances was to be taken away,—to be taken into the direct neighbourhood of London and the Post Office. Very many words she said to her husband, and often the Marquis vacillated. But, when once the promise was given, Lady Frances was strong enough to demand its fulfilment. It was on this occasion that the Marchioness first allowed herself to speak to Mr. Greenwood with absolute disapproval of her husband. "To Hendon Hall!" said Mr. Greenwood, holding up his hands with surprise when the project was explained.

"Yes, indeed! It does seem to me to be the most, —most improper sort of thing to do."

"He can walk over there every day as soon as he has got rid of the letters." Mr. Greenwood probably thought that George Roden was sent about with the Post Office bags.

"Of course they will meet."

"I fear so, Lady Kingsbury."

"Hampstead will arrange that for them."

"No, no!" said the clergyman, as though he were bound on behalf of the family to repudiate an idea that was so damnatory to its honour.

"It is just what he will do. Why else should he want to have her there? With his ideas he would think it the best thing he could do utterly to degrade us all. He has no idea of the honour of his brothers. How should he, when he is so anxious to sacrifice his own sister? As for me, of course, he would do anything to break my heart. He knows that I am anxious for his father's name, and, therefore, he would disgrace me in any way that was possible. But that the Marquis should consent!"

"That is what I cannot understand," said Mr. Greenwood.

"There must be something in it, Mr. Greenwood, which they mean to keep from me."

"The Marquis can't intend to give her to that young man!"

"I don't understand it. I don't understand it at all," said the Marchioness. "He did seem so firm about it. As for the girl herself, I will never see her again after she has left my house in such a fashion. And, to tell the truth, I never wish to see Hampstead again. They are plotting against me; and if there is anything I hate

it is a plot." In this way Mr. Greenwood and the Marchioness became bound together in their great disapproval of Lady Frances and her love.

CHAPTER XI. LADY PERSIFLAGE.

HAMPSTEAD rushed up to Hendon almost without seeing his stepmother, intent on making preparations for his sister, and then, before October was over, rushed back to fetch her. He was very great at rushing, never begrudging himself any personal trouble in what he undertook to do. When he left the house he hardly spoke to her ladyship. When he took Lady Frances away he was of course bound to bid her adieu.

"I think," he said, "that Frances will be happy with me at Hendon."

"I have nothing to do with it,—literally nothing," said the Marchioness, with her sternest frown. "I wash my hands of the whole concern."

"I am sure you would be glad that she should be happy."

"It is impossible that any one should be happy who misconducts herself."

"That, I think, is true."

"It is certainly true, with misconduct such as this."

"I quite agree with what you said first. But the question remains as to what is misconduct. Now——"

"I will not hear you, Hampstead; not a word. You can persuade your father, I dare say, but you cannot persuade me. Fanny has divorced herself from my heart for ever."

"I am sorry for that."

"And I'm bound to say that you are doing the same. It is better in some cases to be plain."

"Oh—certainly; but not to be irrational."

"I am not irrational, and it is most improper for you to speak to me in that way."

"Well, good-bye. I have no doubt it will come right some of these days," said Hampstead, as he took his leave. Then he carried his sister off to Hendon.

Previous to this there had been a great deal of unpleasantness in the house. From the moment in which Lady Kingsbury had heard that her stepdaughter was to go to her brother she had refused even to speak to the unfortunate girl. As far as it was possible she put her husband also into Coventry. She had daily consultations with Mr. Greenwood, and spent most of her hours in embracing, coddling, and spoiling those three unfortunate young noblemen who were being so cruelly injured by their brother and sister. One of her keenest pangs was in seeing how boisterously the three boys romped with "Jack" even after she had dismissed him from her own good graces as utterly unworthy of her regard. That night he positively brought Lord Gregory down into the drawing-room in his night-shirt, having dragged the little urchin out of his cot,—as one might do who was on peculiar terms of friendship with the mother. Lord Gregory was in Elysium, but the mother tore the child from the sinner's arms, and carried him back in anger to the nursery.

"Nothing does children so much good as disturbing them in their sleep," said Lord Hampstead, turning to his father; but the anger of the Marchioness was too serious a thing to allow of a joke.

"From this time forth for evermore she is no child of mine," said Lady Kingsbury the next morning to her

husband, as soon as the carriage had taken the two sinners away from the door.

"It is very wrong to say that. She is your child, and must be your child."

"I have divorced her from my heart;—and also Lord Hampstead. How can it be otherwise, when they are both in rebellion against me? Now there will be this disgraceful marriage. Would you wish that I should receive the Post Office clerk here as my son-in-law?"

"There won't be any disgraceful marriage," said the Marquis. "At least, what I mean is, that it will be much less likely at Hendon than here."

"Less likely than here! Here it would have been impossible. There they will be all together."

"No such thing," said the Marquis. "Hampstead will see to that. And she too has promised me."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Marchioness.

"I won't have you say Pshaw to me when I tell you. Fanny always has kept her word to me, and I don't in the least doubt her. Had she remained here your treatment would have induced her to run away with him at the first word."

"Lord Kingsbury," said the offended lady, "I have always done my duty by the children of your first marriage as a mother should do. I have found them to be violent, and altogether unaware of the duties which their position should impose upon them. It was only yesterday that Lord Hampstead presumed to call me irrational. I have borne a great deal from them, and can bear no more. I wish you would have found some one better able to control their conduct." Then, with a stately step, she stalked out of the room. Under these circumstances, the house was not comfortable to any of the inhabitants.

As soon as her ladyship had reached her own apartments after this rough interview she seated herself at the table, and commenced a letter to her sister, Lady Persiflage, in which she proceeded to give a detailed account of all her troubles and sufferings. Lady Persiflage, who was by a year or two the younger of the two, filled a higher position in society than that of the Marchioness herself. She was the wife only of an Earl; but the Earl was a Knight of the Garter, Lord Lieutenant of his County, and at the present moment Secretary of State for the Home Department. The Marquis had risen to no such honours as these. Lord Persiflage was a peculiar man. Nobody quite knew of what his great gifts consisted. But it was acknowledged of him that he was an astute diplomat; that the honour of England was safe in his hands; and that no more perfect courtier ever gave advice to a well-satisfied sovereign. He was beautiful to look at, with his soft grey hair, his bright eyes, and well-cut features. He was much of a dandy, and, though he was known to be nearer seventy than sixty years of age, he maintained an appearance of almost green juvenility. Active he was not, nor learned, nor eloquent. But he knew how to hold his own, and had held it for many years. He had married his wife when she was very young, and she had become, first a distinguished beauty, and then a leader of fashion. Her sister, our Marchioness, had been past thirty when she married, and had never been quite so much in the world's eye as her sister, Lady Persiflage. And Lady Persiflage was the mother of her husband's heir. The young Lord Hautboy, her eldest son, was now just of age. Lady Kingsbury looked upon him as all that the heir to an earldom ought to be. His mother, too, was proud of him, for he was beautiful as a young Phœbus.

The Earl, his father, was not always as well pleased, because his son had already achieved a knack of spending money. The Persiflage estates were somewhat encumbered, and there seemed to be a probability that Lord Hautboy might create further trouble. Such was the family to whom collectively the Marchioness looked for support in her unhappiness. The letter which she wrote to her sister on the present occasion was as follows;—

*“Trafford Park,
Saturday, October 25th.*

“MY DEAR GERALDINE,—

“I take up my pen to write to you with a heart laden with trouble. Things have become so bad with me that I do not know where to turn myself unless you can give me comfort. I am beginning to feel how terrible it is to have undertaken the position of mother to another person’s children. God knows I have endeavoured to do my duty. But it has all been in vain. Everything is over now. I have divided myself for ever from Hampstead and from Fanny. I have felt myself compelled to tell their father that I have divorced them from my heart; and I have told Lord Hampstead the same. You will understand how terrible must have been the occasion when I found myself compelled to take such a step as this.

“You know how dreadfully shocked I was when she first revealed to me the fact that she had promised to marry that Post Office clerk. The young man had actually the impudence to call on Lord Kingsbury in London, to offer himself as a son-in-law. Kingsbury very properly would not see him, but instructed Mr. Greenwood to do so. Mr. Greenwood has behaved very well in the matter, and is a great comfort to me. I

hope we may be able to do something for him some day. A viler or more ill-conditioned young man he says that he never saw;—insolent, too, and talking as though he had as much right to ask for Fanny's hand as though he were one of the same class. As for that, she would deserve nothing better than to be married to such a man, were it not that all the world would know how closely she is connected with my own darling boys!

“Then we took her off to Königsgraaf; and such a time as I had with her! She would write letters to this wretch, and contrived to receive one. I did stop that, but you cannot conceive what a life she led me. Of course I have felt from the first that she would be divided from her brothers, because one never knows how early bad morals may be inculcated! Then her papa came, and Hampstead,—who in all this has encouraged his sister. The young man is his friend. After this who will say that any nobleman ought to call himself what they call a Liberal? Then we came home; and what do you think has happened? Hampstead has taken his sister to live with him at Hendon, next door, as you may say, to the Post Office clerk, where the young man has made himself thoroughly at home;—and Kingsbury has permitted it! Oh, Geraldine, that is the worst of it! Am I not justified in declaring that I have divorced them from my heart?

“You can hardly feel as I do, you, whose son fills so well that position which an eldest son ought to fill! Here am I with my darlings, not only under a shade, but with this disgrace before them which they will never be able altogether to get rid of. I can divorce Hampstead and his sister from my heart; but they will still be in some sort brother and sister to my poor boys.

How am I to teach them to respect their elder brother, who I suppose must in course of time become Head of the House, when he is hand and glove with a dreadful young man such as that! Am I not justified in declaring that no communication shall be kept up between the two families? If she marries the man she will of course drop the name; but yet all the world will know because of the title. As for him, I am afraid that there is no hope;—although it is odd that the second son does so very often come to the title. If you look into it you will find that the second brother has almost a better chance than the elder,—although I am sure that nothing of the kind will ever happen to dear Hautboy. But he knows how to live in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him! Do write to me at once, and tell me what I ought to do with a due regard to the position to which I have been called upon to fill in the world.

“Your most affectionate sister,

“CLARA KINGSBURY.”

“P.S.—Do remember poor Mr. Greenwood if Lord Persiflage should know how to do something for a clergyman. He is getting old, and Kingsbury has never been able to do anything for him. I hope the Liberals never will be able to do anything for anybody. I don't think Mr. Greenwood would be fit for any duty, because he has been idle all his life, and is now fond of good living; but a deanery would just suit him.”

After the interval of a fortnight Lady Kingsbury received a reply from her sister which the reader may as well see at once.

"*Circle Reader,*

Volume 94.

"MY DEAR CLARA,—

"I don't know that there is anything farther to be done about Fanny. As for divorcing her from your heart, I don't suppose that it amounts to much. I advise you to keep on good terms with Hampstead, because if anything were to happen, it is always well for the Dowager to be friends with the heir. If Fanny will marry the man she must. Lady Di Peacocke married Mr. Billyboy, who was a clerk in one of the offices. They made him Assistant Secretary, and they now live in Portugal Street and do very well. I see Lady Diana about everywhere. Mr. Billyboy can't keep a carriage for her, but that of course is her look-out.

"As to what you say about second sons succeeding, don't think of it. It would get you into a bad frame of mind, and make you hate the very person upon whom you will probably have to depend for much of your comfort.

"I think you should take things easier, and, above all, do not trouble your husband. I am sure he could make himself very unpleasant if he were driven too far. Persiflage has no clerical patronage whatever, and would not interfere about Deans or Bishops for all the world. I suppose he could appoint a Chaplain to an Embassy, but your clergyman seems to be too old and too idle for that.

"Your affectionate sister,

"GERALDINE PERSIFLAGE."

This letter brought very little comfort to the distracted Marchioness. There was much in it so cold that it offended her deeply, and for a moment prompted her

almost to divorce also Lady Persiflage from her heart. Lady Persiflage seemed to think that Fanny should be absolutely encouraged to marry the Post Office clerk, because at some past period some Lady Diana, who at the time was near fifty, had married a clerk also. It might be that a Lady Diana should have run away with a groom, but would that be a reason why so monstrous a crime should be repeated? And then in this letter there was so absolute an absence of all affectionate regard for her own children! She had spoken with great love of Lord Hautboy; but then Lord Hautboy was the acknowledged heir, whereas her own children were nobodies. In this there lay the sting. And then she felt herself to have been rebuked because she had hinted at the possibility of Lord Hampstead's departure for a better world. Lord Hampstead was mortal, as well as others. And why should not his death be contemplated, especially as it would confer so great a benefit on the world at large? Her sister's letter persuaded her of nothing. The divorce should remain as complete as ever. She would not condescend to think of any future advantages which might accrue to her from any intimacy with her stepson. Her dower had been regularly settled. Her duty was to her own children,—and secondly to her husband. If she could succeed in turning him against these two wicked elder children, then she would omit to do nothing which might render his life pleasant to him. Such were the resolutions which she formed on receipt of her sister's letter.

About this time Lord Kingsbury found it necessary to say a few words to Mr. Greenwood. There had not of late been much expression of kindness from the Marquis to the clergyman. Since their return from Germany his lordship had been either taciturn or cross.

Mr. Greenwood took this very much to heart. For though he was most anxious to assure to himself the friendship of the Marchioness he did not at all wish to neglect the Marquis. It was in truth on the Marquis that he depended for everything that he had in the world. The Marquis could send him out of the house to-morrow,—and if this house were closed to him, none other, as far as he knew, would be open to him except the Union. He had lived delicately all his life, and luxuriously,—but fruitlessly as regarded the gathering of any honey for future wants. Whatever small scraps of preferment might have come in his way had been rejected as having been joined with too much of labour and too little of emolument. He had gone on hoping that so great a man as the Marquis would be able to do something for him,—thinking that he might at any rate fasten his patron closely to him by bonds of affection. This had been in days before the coming of the present Marchioness. At first she had not created any special difficulty for him. She did not at once attempt to overthrow the settled politics of the family, and Mr. Greenwood had been allowed to be blandly liberal. But during the last year or two, great management had been necessary. By degrees he had found it essential to fall into the conservative views of her ladyship,—which extended simply to the idea that the cream of the earth should be allowed to be the cream of the earth. It is difficult in the same house to adhere to two political doctrines, because the holders of each will require support at all general meetings. Gradually the Marchioness had become exigent, and the Marquis was becoming aware that he was being thrown over. A feeling of anger was growing up in his mind which he did not himself analyze. When he heard that the clergyman

had taken upon himself to lecture Lady Frances,—for it was thus he read the few words which his son had spoken to him,—he carried his anger with him for a day or two, till at last he found an opportunity of explaining himself to the culprit.

“Lady Frances will do very well where she is,” said the Marquis, in answer to some expression of a wish as to his daughter’s comfort.

“Oh, no doubt!”

“I am not sure that I am fond of too much interference in such matters.”

“Have I interfered, my lord?”

“I do not mean to find any special fault on this occasion.”

“I hope not, my lord.”

“But you did speak to Lady Frances when I think it might have been as well that you should have held your tongue.”

“I had been instructed to see that young man in London.”

“Exactly;—but not to say anything to Lady Frances.”

“I had known her ladyship so many years!”

“Do not drive me to say that you had known her too long.”

Mr. Greenwood felt this to be very hard;—for what he had said to Lady Frances he had in truth said under instruction. That last speech as to having perhaps known the young lady too long seemed to contain a terrible threat. He was thus driven to fall back upon his instructions. “Her ladyship seemed to think that perhaps a word in season——”

The Marquis felt this to be cowardly, and was more inclined to be angry with his old friend than if he had stuck to that former plea of old friendship. “I will not

have interference in this house, and there's an end of it. If I wish you to do anything for me I will tell you. That is all. If you please nothing more shall be said about it. The subject is disagreeable to me."

"Has the Marquis said anything about Lady Frances since she went?" the Marchioness asked the clergyman the next morning. How was he to hold his balance between them if he was to be questioned by both sides in this way? "I suppose he has mentioned her?"

"He just mentioned the name one day."

"Well?"

"I rather think that he does not wish to be interrogated about her ladyship."

"I dare say not. Is he anxious to have her back again?"

"That I cannot say, Lady Kingsbury. I should think he must be."

"Of course I shall be desirous to ascertain the truth. He has been so unreasonable that I hardly know how to speak to him myself. I suppose he tells you!"

"I rather think his lordship will decline to speak about her ladyship just at present."

"Of course it is necessary that I should know. Now that she has chosen to take herself off I shall not choose to live under the same roof with her again. If Lord Kingsbury speaks to you on the subject you should make him understand that." Poor Mr. Greenwood felt that there were thorny paths before him, in which it might be very difficult to guard his feet from pricks. Then he had to consider if there were to be two sides in the house, strongly opposed to each other, with which would it be best for him to take a part? The houses of the Marquis, with all their comforts, were

open for him; but the influence of Lord Persiflage was very great, whereas that of the Marquis was next to nothing.

CHAPTER XII.
CASTLE HAUTOBOY.

“YOU’D better ask the old Traffords down here for a few weeks. Hampstead won’t shoot, but he can hunt with the Braeside harriers.”

This was the answer made by Lord Persiflage to his wife when he was told by her of that divorce which had taken place at Trafford Park, and of the departure of Lady Frances for Hendon. Hampstead and Lady Frances were the old Traffords. Lord Persiflage, too, was a Conservative, but his politics were of a very different order from those entertained by his sister-in-law. He was, above all, a man of the world. He had been our Ambassador at St. Petersburg, and was now a Member of the Cabinet. He liked the good things of office, but had no idea of quarrelling with a Radical because he was a Radical. He cared very little as to the opinions of his guests, if they could make themselves either pleasant or useful. He looked upon his sister-in-law as an old fool, and had no idea of quarrelling with Hampstead for her sake. If the girl persisted in making a bad match she must take the consequences. No great harm would come,—except to her. As to the evil done to his “order,” that did not affect Lord Persiflage at all. He did not expect his order to endure for ever. All orders become worn out in time, and effete. He had no abhorrence for anybody; but he liked pleasant people; he liked to treat everything

as a joke; and he liked the labours of his not un-laborious life to be minimised. Having given his orders about the old Traffords, as he called them in reference to the "darlings," he said nothing more on the subject. Lady Persiflage wrote a note to "Dear Fanny," conveying the invitation in three words, and received a reply to the effect that she and her brother would be at Castle Hautboy before the end of November. Hampstead would perhaps bring a couple of horses, but he would put them up at the livery stables at Penrith.

"How do you do, Hampstead," said Persiflage when he first met his guest before dinner on the day of the arrival. "You haven't got rid of everything yet?"

This question was supposed to refer to Lord Hampstead's revolutionary tendencies. "Not quite so thoroughly as we hope to do soon."

"I always think it a great comfort that in our country the blackguards are so considerate. I must own that we do very little for them, and yet they never knock us over the head or shoot at us, as they do in Russia and Germany and France." Then he passed on, having said quite enough for one conversation.

"So you've gone off to Hendon to live with your brother?" said Lady Persiflage to her niece.

"Yes; indeed," said Lady Fanny, blushing at the implied allusion to her low-born lover which was contained in this question.

But Lady Persiflage had no idea of saying a word about the lover, or of making herself in any way unpleasant. "I dare say it will be very comfortable for you both," she said; "but we thought you might be a little lonely till you got used to it, and therefore asked you to come down for a week or two. The house is full of people, and you will be sure to find some one

that you know." Not a word was said at Castle Hautboy as to those terrible things which had occurred in the Trafford family.

Young Vivian was there, half, as he said, for ornament, but partly for pleasure and partly for business. "He likes to have a private secretary with him," he said to Hampstead, "in order that people might think there is something to do. As a rule they never send anything down from the Foreign Office at this time of year. He always has a Foreign Minister or two in the house, or a few Secretaries of Legation, and that gives an air of business. Nothing would offend or surprise him so much as if one of them were to say a word about affairs. Nobody ever does, and therefore he is supposed to be the safest Foreign Minister that we've had in Downing Street since old ——'s time."

"Well, Hautboy." "Well, Hampstead." Thus the two heirs greeted each other. "You'll come and shoot to-morrow?" asked the young host.

"I never shoot. I thought all the world knew that."

"The best cock-shooting in all England," said Hautboy. "But we shan't come to that for the next month."

"Cocks or hens, pheasants, grouse, or partridge, rabbits or hares, it's all one to me. I couldn't hit 'em if I would, and I wouldn't if I could."

"There is a great deal in the couldn't," said Hautboy. "As for hunting, those Braeside fellows go out two or three times a week. But it's a wretched sort of affair. They hunt hares or foxes just as they come, and they're always climbing up a ravine or tumbling down a precipice."

"I can climb and tumble as well as any one," said Hampstead. So that question as to the future amusement of the guest was settled.

But the glory of the house of Hauteville,—Hauteville was the Earl's family name,—at present shone most brightly in the person of the eldest daughter, Lady Amaldina. Lady Amaldina, who was as beautiful in colour, shape, and proportion as wax could make a Venus, was engaged to marry the eldest son of the Duke of Merioneth. The Marquis of Llwdytlw was a young man about forty years of age, of great promise, who had never been known to do a foolish thing in his life, and his father was one of those half-dozen happy noblemen, each of whom is ordinarily reported to be the richest man in England. Lady Amaldina was not unnaturally proud of her high destiny, and as the alliance had already been advertised in all the newspapers, she was not unwilling to talk about it. Lady Frances was not exactly a cousin, but stood in the place of a cousin, and therefore was regarded as a good listener for all the details which had to be repeated. It might be that Lady Amaldina took special joy in having such a listener, because Lady Frances herself had placed her own hopes so low. That story as to the Post Office clerk was known to everybody at Castle Hautboy. Lady Persiflage ridiculed the idea of keeping such things secret. Having so much to be proud of in regard to her own children, she thought that there should be no such secrets. If Fanny Trafford did intend to marry the Post Office clerk it would be better that all the world should know it beforehand. Lady Amaldina knew it, and was delighted at having a confidante whose views and prospects in life were so different from her own. "Of course, dear, you have heard what is going to happen to me," she said, smiling.

"I have heard of your engagement with the son of the Duke of Merioneth, the man with the terrible Welsh name."

“When you once know how to pronounce it it is the prettiest word that poetry ever produced!” Then Lady Amaldina did pronounce her future name;—but nothing serviceable would be done for the reader if an attempt were made to write the sound which she produced. “I am not sure but what it was the name which first won my heart. I can sign it now quite easily without a mistake.”

“It won’t be long, I suppose, before you will have to do so always?”

“An age, my dear! The Duke’s affairs are of such a nature,—and Llwdythlw is so constantly engaged in business, that I don’t suppose it will take place for the next ten years. What with settlements, and entails, and Parliament, and the rest of it, I shall be an old woman before I am,—led to the hymeneal altar.”

“Ten years!” said Lady Fanny.

“Well, say ten months, which seems to be just as long.”

“Isn’t he in a hurry?”

“Oh, awfully; but what can he do, poor fellow? He is so placed that he cannot have his affairs arranged for him in half-an-hour, as other men can do. It is a great trouble having estates so large and interests so complicated! Now there is one thing I particularly want to ask you.”

“What is it?”

“About being one of the bridesmaids.”

“One can hardly answer for ten years hence.”

“That is nonsense, of course. I am determined to have no girl who has not a title. It isn’t that I care about that kind of thing in the least, but the Duke does. And then I think the list will sound more distinguished in the newspapers, if all the Christian

names are given with the Lady before them. There are to be his three sisters, Lady Anne, Lady Antonette, and Lady Anatolia;—then my two sisters, Lady Alphonsa and Lady Amelia. To be sure they are very young."

"They may be old enough according to what you say."

"Yes, indeed. And then there will be Lady Archella Portroyal, and Lady Augusta Gelashires. I have got the list written out somewhere, and there are to be just twenty."

"If the catalogue is finished there will hardly be room for me."

"The Earl of Knocknacoppul's daughter has sent me word that she must refuse, because her own marriage will take place first. She would have put it off, as she is only going to marry an Irish baronet, and because she is dying to have her name down as one of the bevy, but he says that if she delays any longer he'll go on a shooting expedition to the Rocky Mountains, and then perhaps he might never come back. So there is a vacancy."

"I hardly like to make a promise so long beforehand. Perhaps I might have a young man, and he might go off to the Rocky Mountains."

"That's just what made me not put down your name at first. Of course you know we've heard about Mr. Roden?"

"I didn't know," said Lady Frances, blushing.

"Oh dear, yes. Everybody knows it. And I think it such a brave thing to do,—if you're really attached to him!"

"I should never marry any man without being attached to him," said Lady Frances.

"That's of course! But I mean romantically attached. I don't pretend to that kind of thing with

Llwdythlw. I don't think it necessary in a marriage of this kind. He is a great deal older than I am, and is bald. I suppose Mr. Roden is very, very handsome?"

"I have not thought much about that."

"I should have considered that one would want it for a marriage of that kind. I don't know whether after all it isn't the best thing to do. Romance is so delicious!"

"But then it's delicious to be a Duchess," said Lady Frances, with the slightest touch of irony.

"Oh, no doubt! One has to look at it all round, and then to form a judgment. It went a great way with papa, I know, Llwdythlw being such a good man of business. He has been in the Household, and the Queen will be sure to send a handsome present. I expect to have the grandest show of wedding presents that any girl has yet exhibited in England. Ever so many people have asked mamma already as to what I should like best. Mr. MacWhapple said out plain that he would go to a hundred and fifty pounds. He is a Scotch manufacturer, and has papa's interest in Wigtonshire. I suppose you don't intend to do anything very grand in that way."

"I suppose not, as I don't know any Scotch manufacturers. But my marriage, if I ever am married, is a thing so much of the future that I haven't even begun to think of my dress yet."

"I'll tell you a secret," said Lady Amaldina, whispering. "Mine is already made, and I've tried it on."

"You might get ever so much stouter in ten years," said Lady Frances.

"That of course was joking. But we did think the marriage would come off last June, and as we were in

Paris in April the order was given. Don't you tell anybody about that."

Then it was settled that the name of Lady Frances should be put down on the list of bridesmaids, but put down in a doubtful manner, — as is done with other things of great importance.

A few days after Lord Hampstead's arrival a very great dinner-party was given at the Castle, at which all the county round was invited. Castle Hautboy is situated near Pooily Bridge, just in the county of Westmoreland, on an eminence, giving it a grand prospect over Ulleswater, which is generally considered to be one of the Cumberland Lakes. Therefore the gentry from the two counties were invited as far round as Penrith, Shap, Bampton, and Patterdale. The Earl's property in that neighbourhood was scattered about through the two counties, and was looked after by a steward, or manager, who lived himself at Penrith, and was supposed to be very efficacious in such duties. His name was Crocker; and not only was he invited to the dinner, but also his son, who happened at the time to be enjoying the month's holiday which was allowed to him by the authorities of the office in London to which he was attached.

The reader may remember that a smart young man of this name sat at the same desk with George Roden at the General Post Office. Young Crocker was specially delighted with the honour done him on this occasion. He not only knew that his fellow clerk's friend, Lord Hampstead, was at the Castle, and his sister, Lady Frances, with him; but he also knew that George Roden was engaged to marry that noble lady! Had he heard this before he left London, he would probably have endeavoured to make some atonement for his insolence to

Roden; for he was in truth filled with a strong admiration for the man who had before him the possibility of such high prospects. But the news had only reached him since he had been in the North. Now he thought that he might possibly find an opportunity of making known to Lord Hampstead his intimacy with Roden, and of possibly saying a word—just uttering a hint—as to that future event.

It was long before he could find himself near enough to Lord Hampstead to address him. He had even refused to return home with his father, who did not like being very late on the road, saying that he had got a lift into town in another conveyance. This he did, with the prospect of having to walk six miles into Penrith in his dress boots, solely with the object of saying a few words to Roden's friend. At last he was successful.

"We have had what I call an extremely pleasant evening, my lord." It was thus he commenced; and Hampstead, whose practice it was to be specially graceful to any one whom he chanced to meet but did not think to be a gentleman, replied very courteously that the evening had been pleasant.

"Quite a thing to remember," continued Crocker.

"Perhaps one remembers the unpleasant things the longest," said Hampstead, laughing.

"Oh, no, my lord, not that. I always forget the unpleasant. That's what I call philosophy." Then he broke away into the subject that was near his heart. "I wish our friend Roden had been here, my lord."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh dear, yes;—most intimate. We sit in the same room at the Post Office. And at the same desk,—as thick as thieves, as the saying is. We often have a crack about your lordship."

"I have a great esteem for George Roden. He and I are really friends. I know no one for whom I have a higher regard." This he said with an earnest voice, thinking himself bound to express his friendship more loudly than he would have done had the friend been in his own rank of life.

"That's just what I feel. Roden is a man that will rise."

"I hope so."

"He'll be sure to get something good before long. They'll make him a Surveyor, or Chief Clerk, or something of that kind. I'll back him to have £500 a year before any man in the office. There'll be a shindy about it, of course. There always is a shindy when a fellow is put up out of his turn. But he needn't care for that. They can laugh as win. Eh, my lord!"

"He would be the last to wish an injustice to be done for his own good."

"We've got to take that as it comes, my lord. I won't say but what I should like to go up at once to a senior class over other men's heads. There isn't a chance of that, because I'm independent, and the seniors don't like me. Old Jerningham is always down upon me just for that reason. You ask Roden, and he'll tell you the same thing,—my lord." Then came a momentary break in the conversation, and Lord Hampstead was seizing advantage of it to escape. But Crocker, who had taken enough wine to be bold, saw the attempt, and intercepted it. He was desirous of letting the lord know all that he knew. "Roden is a happy dog, my lord."

"Happy, I hope, though not a dog," said Hampstead, trusting that he could retreat gracefully behind the joke.

"Ha, ha, ha! The dog only meant what a lucky fellow he is. I have heard him speak in raptures of what is in store for him."

“What!”

“There’s no happiness like married happiness; is there, my lord?”

“Upon my word, I can’t say. Good night to you.”

“I hope you will come and see me and Roden at the office some of these days.”

“Good night, good night!” Then the man did go. For a moment or two Lord Hampstead felt actually angry with his friend. Could it be that Roden should make so little of his sister’s name as to talk about her to the Post Office clerks,—to so mean a fellow as this! And yet the man certainly knew the fact of the existing engagement. Hampstead thought it impossible that it should have travelled beyond the limits of his own family. It was natural that Roden should have told his mother; but unnatural,—so Hampstead thought,—that his friend should have made his sister a subject of conversation to any one else. It was horrible to him that a stranger such as that should have spoken to him about his sister at all. But surely it was not possible that Roden should have sinned after that fashion. He soon resolved that it was not possible. But how grievous a thing it was that a girl’s name should be made so common in the mouths of men!

After that he sauntered into the smoking-room, where were congregated the young men who were staying in the house. “That’s a kind of thing that happens only once a year,” said Hautboy, speaking to all the party; “but I cannot, for the life of me, see why it should happen at all.”

“Your governor finds that it succeeds in the county,” said one.

“He polishes off a whole heap at one go,” said another.

"It does help to keep a party together," said a third.

"And enables a lot of people to talk of dining at Castle Hautboy without lying," said a fourth.

"But why should a lot of people be enabled to say that they'd dined here?" asked Hautboy. "I like to see my friends at dinner. What did you think about it, Hampstead?"

"It's all according to Hampstead's theories," said one.

"Only he'd have had the tinkers and the tailors too," said another.

"And wouldn't have had the ladies and gentlemen," said a third.

"I would have had the tailors and tinkers," said Hampstead, "and I would have had the ladies and gentlemen, too, if I could have got them to meet the tailors and tinkers;—but I would not have had that young man who got me out into the hall just now."

"Why,—that was Crocker, the Post Office clerk," said Hautboy. "Why shouldn't we have a Post Office clerk as well as some one else? Nevertheless, Crocker is a bad cad." In the mean time Crocker was walking home to Penrith in his dress boots.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRAESIDE HARRIERS.

THE Braeside Harriers can hardly be called a "crack" pack of hounds. Lord Hautboy had been right in saying that they were always scrambling through ravines, and that they hunted whatever they could find to hunt. Nevertheless, the men and the hounds were in earnest, and did accomplish a fair average of sport under diffi-

cult circumstances. No "Pegasus" or "Littlelegs," or "Pigskin," ever sent accounts of wondrous runs from Cumberland or Westmoreland to the sporting papers, in which the gentlemen who had asked the special Pigskin of the day to dinner were described as having been "in" at some "glorious finish" on their well-known horses Banker or Buff,—the horses named being generally those which the gentlemen wished to sell. The names of gorses and brooks had not become historic, as have those of Ranksborough and Whissendine. Trains were not run to suit this or the other meet. Gentlemen did not get out of fast drags with pretty little aprons tied around their waists, like girls in a country house coming down to breakfast. Not many perhaps wore pink coats, and none pink tops. One horse would suffice for one day's work. An old assistant huntsman in an old red coat, with one boy mounted on a ragged pony, served for an establishment. The whole thing was despicable in the eyes of men from the Quorn and Cottesmore. But there was some wonderful riding and much constant sport with the Braeside Harriers, and the country had given birth to certainly the best hunting song in the language;—

Do you ken John Peel with his coat so gay;
 Do you ken John Peel at the break of day;
 Do you ken John Peel when he's far, far away
 With his hounds and his horn in the morning.

Such as the Braeside Harriers were, Lord Hampstead determined to make the experiment, and on a certain morning had himself driven to Cronelloe Thorn, a favourite meet halfway between Penrith and Keswick.

I hold that nothing is so likely to be permanently prejudicial to the interest of hunting in the British Isles as a certain flavour of tip-top fashion which has gradu-

ally enveloped it. There is a pretence of grandeur about that and, alas, about other sports also, which is, to my thinking, destructive of all sport itself. Men will not shoot unless game is made to appear before them in clouds. They will not fish unless the rivers be exquisite. To row is nothing unless you can be known as a national hero. Cricket requires appendages which are troublesome and costly, and by which the minds of economical fathers are astounded. To play a game of hockey in accordance with the times you must have a specially trained pony and a gaudy dress. Racquets have given place to tennis because tennis is costly. In all these cases the fashion of the game is much more cherished than the game itself. But in nothing is this feeling so predominant as in hunting. For the management of a pack, as packs are managed now, a huntsman needs must be a great man himself, and three mounted subordinates are necessary, as at any rate for two of these servants a second horse is required. A hunt is nothing in the world unless it goes out four times a week at least. A run is nothing unless the pace be that of a steeplechase. Whether there be or be not a fox before the hounds is of little consequence to the great body of riders. A bold huntsman who can make a dash across country from one covert to another, and who can so train his hounds that they shall run as though game were before them, is supposed to have provided good sport. If a fox can be killed in covert afterwards so much the better for those who like to talk of their doings. Though the hounds brought no fox with them, it is of no matter. When a fox does run according to his nature he is reviled as a useless brute, because he will not go straight across country. But the worst of all is the attention given by men to things altogether outside the sport.

Their coats and waistcoats, their boots and breeches, their little strings and pretty scarfs, their saddles and bridles, their dandy knick-knacks, and, above all, their flasks, are more to many men than aught else in the day's proceedings. I have known girls who thought that their first appearance in the ball-room, when all was fresh, unstained, and perfect from the milliner's hand, was the one moment of rapture for the evening. I have sometimes felt the same of young sportsmen at a Leicestershire or Northamptonshire meet. It is not that they will not ride when the occasion comes. They are always ready enough to break their bones. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that dandyism is antagonistic to pluck. The fault is that men train themselves to care for nothing that is not as costly as unlimited expenditure can make it. Thus it comes about that the real love of sport is crushed under a desire for fashion. A man will be almost ashamed to confess that he hunts in Essex or Sussex, because the proper thing is to go down to the Shires. Grass, no doubt, is better than ploughed land to ride upon; but, taking together the virtues and vices of all hunting counties, I doubt whether better sport is not to be found in what I will venture to call the haunts of the clodpoles, than among the palmy pastures of the well-breeched beauties of Leicestershire.

Braeside Harriers though they were, a strong taste for foxes had lately grown up in the minds of men and in the noses of hounds. Blank days they did not know, because a hare would serve the turn if the nobler animal were not forthcoming; but ideas of preserving had sprung up; steps were taken to solace the minds of old women who had lost their geese; and the Braeside Harriers, though they had kept their name, were gradually losing their character. On this occasion the hounds were taken

off to draw a covert instead of going to a so-ho, as regularly as though they were advertised among the fox-hounds in *The Times*. It was soon known that Lord Hampstead was Lord Hampstead, and he was welcomed by the field. What matter that he was a revolutionary Radical if he could ride to hounds? At any rate, he was the son of a Marquis, and was not left to that solitude which sometimes falls upon a man who appears suddenly as a stranger among strangers on a hunting morning. "I am glad to see you out, my lord," said Mr. Amblethwaite, the Master. "It isn't often that we get recruits from Castle Hautboy."

"They think a good deal of shooting there."

"Yes; and they keep their horses in Northamptonshire. Lord Hautboy does his hunting there. The Earl, I think, never comes out now."

"I dare say not. He has all the foreign nations to look after."

"I suppose he has his hands pretty full," said Mr. Amblethwaite. "I know I have mine just at this time of the year. Where do you think these hounds ran their fox to last Friday? We found him outside of the Lowther Woods, near the village of Clifton. They took him straight over Shap Fell, and then turning sharp to the right, went all along Hawes Wall and over High Street into Troutbeck."

"That's all among the mountains," said Hampstead.

"Mountains! I should think so. I have to spend half my time among the mountains."

"But you couldn't ride over High Street?"

"No, we couldn't ride; not there. But we had to make our way round, some of us, and some of them went on foot. Dick never lost sight of the hounds the whole day." Dick was the boy who rode the ragged

pony. "When we found 'em there he was with half the hounds around him, and the fox's brush stuck in his cap."

"How did you get home that night?" asked Hampstead.

"Home! I didn't get home at all. It was pitch dark before we got the rest of the hounds together. Some of them we didn't find till next day. I had to go and sleep at Bowness, and thought myself very lucky to get a bed. Then I had to ride home next day over Kirkstone Fell. That's what I call something like work for a man and horse.—There's a fox in there, my lord, do you hear them?" Then Mr. Amblethwaite bustled away to assist at the duty of getting the fox to break.

"I'm glad to see that you're fond of this kind of thing, my lord," said a voice in Hampstead's ear, which, though he had only heard it once, he well remembered. It was Crocker, the guest at the dinner-party,—Crocker, the Post Office clerk.

"Yes," said Lord Hampstead, "I am very fond of this kind of thing. That fox has broken, I think, at the other side of the cover." Then he trotted off down a little lane between two loose-built walls, so narrow that there was no space for two men to ride abreast. His object at that moment was to escape Crocker rather than to look after the hounds.

They were in a wild country, not exactly on a mountain side, but among hills which not far off grew into mountains, where cultivation of the rudest kind was just beginning to effect its domination over human nature. There was a long spinney rather than a wood stretching down a bottom, through which a brook ran. It would now cease, and then renew itself, so that the trees, though not absolutely continuous, were nearly so for the

distance of half a mile. The ground on each side was rough with big stones, and steep in some places as they went down the hill. But still it was such that horsemen could gallop on it. The fox made his way along the whole length, and then traversing, so as to avoid the hounds, ran a ring up the hillside, and back into the spinney again. Among the horsemen many declared that the brute must be killed unless he would make up his mind for a fair start. Mr. Amblethwaite was very busy, hunting the hounds himself, and intent rather on killing the fox fairly than on the hopes of a run. Perhaps he was not desirous of sleeping out another night on the far side of Helvellyn. In this way the sportsmen galloped up and down the side of the wood till the feeling arose, as it does on such occasions, that it might be well for a man to stand still awhile and spare his horse, in regard to the future necessities of the day. Lord Hampstead did as others were doing, and in a moment Crocker was by his side. Crocker was riding an animal which his father was wont to drive about the country, but one well known in the annals of the Braeside Harriers. It was asserted of him that the fence was not made which he did not know how to creep over. Of jumping, such as jumping is supposed to be in the shires, he knew nothing. He was, too, a bad hand at galloping, but with a shambling, half cantering trot, which he had invented for himself, he could go along all day, not very quickly, but in such fashion as never to be left altogether behind. He was a flea-bitten horse, if my readers know what that is,—a flea-bitten roan, or white covered with small red spots. Horses of this colour are ugly to look at, but are very seldom bad animals. Such as he was, Crocker, who did not ride much when up in London, was very proud of him.

Crocker was dressed in a green coat, which in a moment of extravagance he had had made for hunting, and in brown breeches, in which he delighted to display himself on all possible occasions. "My lord," he said, "you'd hardly think it, but I believe this horse to be the best hunter in Cumberland."

"Is he, indeed? Some horse of course must be the best, and why not yours?"

"There's nothing he can't do;—nothing. His jumping is mi—raculous, and as for pace, you'd be quite surprised.—They're at him again now. What an echo they do make among the hills!"

Indeed they did. Every now and then the Master would just touch his horn, giving a short blast, just half a note, and then the sound would come back, first from this rock and then from the other, and the hounds as they heard it would open as though encouraged by the music of the hills, and then their voices would be carried round the valley, and come back again and again from the steep places, and they would become louder and louder as though delighted with the effect of their own efforts. Though there should be no hunting, the concert was enough to repay a man for his trouble in coming there. "Yes," said Lord Hampstead, his disgust at the man having been quenched for the moment by the charm of the music, "it is a wonderful spot for echoes."

"It's what I call awfully nice. We don't have anything like that up at St. Martin's-le-Grand." Perhaps it may be necessary to explain that the Post Office in London stands in a spot bearing that poetic name.

"I don't remember any echoes there," said Lord Hampstead.

"No, indeed;—nor yet no hunting, nor yet no hounds;

are there, my lord? All the same, it's not a bad sort of place!"

"A very respectable public establishment!" said Lord Hampstead.

"Just so, my lord; that's just what I always say. It ain't swell like Downing Street, but it's a deal more respectable than the Custom House."

"Is it? I didn't know."

"Oh yes. They all admit that. You ask Roden else." On hearing the name, Lord Hampstead began to move his horse, but Crocker was at his side and could not be shaken off. "Have you heard from him, my lord, since you have been down in these parts?"

"Not a word."

"I dare say he thinks more of writing to a correspondent of the fairer sex."

This was unbearable. Though the fox had again turned and gone up the valley,—a movement which seemed to threaten his instant death, and to preclude any hope of a run from that spot,—Hampstead felt himself compelled to escape, if he could. In his anger he touched his horse with his spur and galloped away among the rocks, as though his object was to assist Mr. Amblethwaite in his almost frantic efforts. But Crocker cared nothing for the stones. Where the lord went, he went. Having made acquaintance with a lord, he was not going to waste the blessing which Providence had vouchsafed to him.

"He'll never leave that place alive, my lord."

"I dare say not." And again the persecuted nobleman rode on,—thinking that neither should Crocker, if he could have his will.

"By the way, as we are talking of Roden——"

"I haven't been talking about him at all." Crocker

caught the tone of anger, and stared at his companion. "I'd rather not talk about him."

"My lord! I hope there has been nothing like a quarrel. For the lady's sake, I hope there's no misunderstanding!"

"Mr. Crocker," he said very slowly, "it isn't customary——"

At that moment the fox broke, the hounds were away, and Mr. Ambleswaite was seen rushing down the hill-side, as though determined on breaking his neck. Lord Hampstead rushed after him at a pace which, for a time, defied Mr. Crocker. He became thoroughly ashamed of himself in even attempting to make the man understand that he was sinning against good taste. He could not do so without some implied mention of his sister, and to allude to his sister in connection with such a man was a profanation. He could only escape from the brute. Was this a punishment which he was doomed to bear for being—as his stepmother was wont to say—untrue to his order?

In the mean time the hounds went at a great pace down the hill. Some of the old stagers, who knew the country well, made a wide sweep round to the left, whence by lanes and tracks, which were known to them, they could make their way down to the road which leads along Ulleswater to Patterdale. In doing this they might probably not see the hounds again that day,—but such are the charms of hunting in a hilly country. They rode miles around, and though they did again see the hounds, they did not see the hunt. To have seen the hounds as they start, and to see them again as they are clustering round the huntsman after eating their fox, is a great deal to some men.

On this occasion it was Hampstead's lot—and Crocker's—to do much more than that. Though they

had started down a steep valley,—down the side rather of a gully,—they were not making their way out from among the hills into the low country. The fox soon went up again,—not back, but over an intervening spur of a mountain towards the lake. The riding seemed sometimes to Hampstead to be impossible. But Mr. Amblethwaite did it, and he stuck to Mr. Amblethwaite. It would have been all very well had not Crocker stuck to him. If the old roan would only tumble among the stones what an escape there would be! But the old roan was true to his character, and, to give every one his due, the Post Office clerk rode as well as the lord. There was nearly an hour and a-half of it before the hounds ran into their fox just as he was gaining an earth among the bushes and hollies with which Airey Force is surrounded. Then on the sloping meadow just above the waterfall, the John Peel of the hunt dragged out the fox from among the trees, and, having dismembered him artistically, gave him to the hungry hounds. Then it was that perhaps half-a-dozen diligent, but cautious, huntsmen came up, and heard all those details of the race which they were afterwards able to give, as on their own authority, to others who had been as cautious, but not so diligent, as themselves.

“One of the best things I ever saw in this country,” said Crocker, who had never seen a hound in any other country. At this moment he had ridden up alongside of Hampstead on the way back to Penrith. The Master and the hounds and Crocker must go all the way. Hampstead would turn off at Pooley Bridge. But still there were four miles, during which he would be subjected to his tormentor.

“Yes, indeed. A very good thing, as I was saying, Mr. Amblethwaite.”

CHAPTER XIV.

COMING HOME FROM HUNTING.

LORD HAMPSTEAD had been discussing with Mr. Amblethwaite the difficult nature of hunting in such a county as Cumberland. The hounds were in the road before them with John Peel in the midst of them. Dick with the ragged pony was behind, looking after stragglers. Together with Lord Hampstead and the Master was a hard-riding, rough, weather-beaten half-gentleman, half-farmer, named Patterson, who lived a few miles beyond Penrith and was Amblethwaite's right hand in regard to hunting. Just as Crocker joined them the road had become narrow, and the young lord had fallen a little behind. Crocker had seized his opportunity;—but the lord also seized his, and thrust himself in between Mr. Patterson and the Master. "That's all true," said the Master. "Of course we don't presume to do the thing as you swells do it down in the Shires. We haven't the money, and we haven't the country, and we haven't the foxes. But I don't know whether for hunting we don't see as much of it as you do."

"Quite as much, if I may take to-day as a sample."

"Very ordinary;—wasn't it, Amblethwaite?" asked Patterson, who was quite determined to make the most of his own good things.

"It was not bad to-day. The hounds never left their scent after they found him. I think our hillsides carry the scent better than our grasses. If you want to ride, of course, it's rough. But if you like hunting, and don't mind a scramble, perhaps you may see it here as well as elsewhere."

"Better, a deal, from all I hear tell," said Patterson.

"Did you ever hear any music like that in Leicestershire, my lord?"

"I don't know that ever I did," said Hampstead. "I enjoyed myself amazingly."

"I hope you'll come again," said the Master, "and that often."

"Certainly, if I remain here."

"I knew his lordship would like it," said Crocker, crowding in on a spot where it was possible for four to ride abreast. "I think it was quite extraordinary to see how a stranger like his lordship got over our country."

"Clever little 'orse his lordship's on," said Patterson.

"It's the man more than the beast, I think," said Crocker, trying to flatter.

"The best man in England," said Patterson, "can't ride to hounds without a tidy animal under him."

"Nor yet can't the best horse in England stick to hounds without a good man on top of him," said the determined Crocker. Patterson grunted,—hating flattery, and remembering that the man flattered was a lord.

Then the road became narrow again, and Hampstead fell a little behind. Crocker was alongside of him in a moment. There seemed to be something mean in running away from the man;—something at any rate absurd in seeming to run away from him. Hampstead was ashamed in allowing himself to be so much annoyed by such a cause. He had already snubbed the man, and the man might probably be now silent on the one subject which was so peculiarly offensive. "I suppose," said he, beginning a conversation which should show that he was willing to discuss any general matter with Mr. Crocker, "that the country north and west of Penrith is less hilly than this?"

"Oh, yes, my lord; a delightful country to ride over

in some parts. Is Roden fond of following the hounds, my lord?"

"I don't in the least know," said Hampstead, curtly. Then he made another attempt. "These hounds don't go as far north as Carlisle?"

"Oh, no, my lord; never more than eight or ten miles from Penrith. They've another pack up in that country; nothing like ours, but still they do show sport. I should have thought now Roden would have been just the man to ride to hounds,—if he got the opportunity."

"I don't think he ever saw a hound in his life. I'm rather in a hurry, and I think I shall trot on."

"I'm in a hurry myself," said Crocker, "and I shall be happy to show your lordship the way. It isn't above a quarter of a mile's difference to me going by Pooley Bridge instead of Dallmaine."

"Pray don't do anything of the kind; I can find the road." Whereupon Hampstead shook hands cordially with the Master, bade Mr. Patterson good-bye with a kindly smile, and trotted on beyond the hounds as quickly as he could.

But Crocker was not to be shaken off. The flea-bitten roan was as good at the end of a day as he was at the beginning, and trotted on gallantly. When they had gone some quarter of a mile Hampstead acknowledged to himself that it was beyond his power to shake off his foe. By that time Crocker had made good his position close alongside of the lord, with his horse's head even with that of the other. "There is a word, my lord, I want to say to you." This Crocker muttered somewhat piteously, so that Hampstead's heart was for the moment softened towards him. He checked his horse and prepared himself to listen. "I hope I haven't given any offence. I can assure you, my lord, I haven't intended

it. I have so much respect for your lordship that I wouldn't do it for the world."

What was he to do? He had been offended. He had intended to show that he was offended. And yet he did not like to declare as much openly. His object had been to stop the man from talking, and to do so if possible without making any reference himself to the subject in question. Were he now to declare himself offended he could hardly do so without making some allusion to his sister. But he had determined that he would make no such allusion. Now as the man appealed to him, asking as it were forgiveness for some fault of which he was not himself conscious, it was impossible to refrain from making him some answer. "All right," he said; "I'm sure you didn't mean anything. Let us drop it, and there will be an end of it."

"Oh, certainly;—and I'm sure I'm very much obliged to your lordship. But I don't quite know what it is that ought to be dropped. As I am so intimate with Roden, sitting at the same desk with him every day of my life, it did seem natural to speak to your lordship about him."

This was true. As it had happened that Crocker, who as well as Roden was a Post Office Clerk, had appeared as a guest at Castle Hautboy, it had been natural that he should speak of his office companion to a man who was notoriously that companion's friend. Hampstead did not quite believe in the pretended intimacy, having heard Roden declare that he had not as yet formed any peculiar friendship at the Office. He had too felt, unconsciously, that such a one as Roden ought not to be intimate with such a one as Crocker. But there was no cause of offence in this. "It was natural," he said.

"And then I was unhappy when I thought from what you said that there had been some quarrel."

"There has been no quarrel," said Hampstead.

"I am very glad indeed to hear that." He was beginning to touch again on a matter that should have been private. What was it to him whether or no there was a quarrel between Lord Hampstead and Roden. Hampstead therefore again rode on in silence.

"I should have been so very sorry that anything should have occurred to interfere with our friend's brilliant prospects." Lord Hampstead looked about to see whether there was any spot at which he could make his escape by jumping over a fence. On the right hand there was the lake rippling up on to the edge of the road, and on the left was a high stone wall, without any vestige of an aperture through it as far as the eye could reach. He was already making the pace as fast as he could, and was aware that no escape could be effected in that manner. He shook his head, and bit the handle of his whip, and looked straight away before him through his horse's ears. "You cannot think how proud I've been that a gentleman sitting at the same desk with myself should have been so fortunate in his matrimonial prospects. I think it an honour to the Post Office all round."

"Mr. Crocker," said Lord Hampstead, pulling up his horse suddenly, and standing still upon the spot, "if you will remain here for five minutes I will ride on; or if you will ride on I will remain here till you are out of sight. I must insist that one of these arrangements be made."

"My lord!"

"Which shall it be?"

"Now I have offended you again."

"Don't talk of offence, but just do as I bid you. I want to be alone."

"Is it about the matrimonial alliance?" demanded

Crocker almost in tears. Thereupon Lord Hampstead turned his horse round and trotted back towards the hounds and horsemen, whom he heard on the road behind him. Crocker paused a moment, trying to discover by the light of his own intellect what might have been the cause of this singular conduct on the part of the young nobleman, and then, having failed to throw any light on the matter, he rode on homewards, immersed in deep thought. Hampstead, when he found himself again with his late companions, asked some idle questions as to the hunting arrangements of next week. That they were idle he was quite aware, having resolved that he would not willingly put himself into any position in which it might be probable that he should again meet that objectionable young man. But he went on with his questions, listening or not listening to Mr. Amblethwaite's answers, till he parted company with his companions in the neighbourhood of Pooley Bridge. Then he rode alone to Hautboy Castle, with his mind much harassed by what had occurred. It seemed to him to have been almost proved that George Roden must have spoken to this man of his intended marriage. In all that the man had said he had suggested that the information had come direct from his fellow-clerk. He had seemed to declare,—Hampstead thought that he had declared,—that Roden had often discussed the marriage with him. If so, how base must have been his friend's conduct! How thoroughly must he have been mistaken in his friend's character! How egregiously wrong must his sister have been in her estimate of the man! For himself, as long as the question had been simply one of his own intimacy with a companion whose outside position in the world had been inferior to his own, he had been proud of what he had done, and had answered those who had remonstrated

with him with a spirit showing that he despised their practices quite as much as they could ridicule his. He had explained to his father his own ideas of friendship, and had been eager in showing that George Roden's company was superior to most young men of his own position. There had been Hautboy, and Scatterdash, and Lord Plunge, and the young Earl of Longoods, all of them elder sons, whom he described as young men without a serious thought in their heads. What was it to him how Roden got his bread, so long as he got it honestly? "The man's the man for a' that." Thus he had defended himself and been quite conscious that he was right. When Roden had suddenly fallen in love with his sister, and his sister had as suddenly fallen in love with Roden,—then he had begun to doubt. A thing which was in itself meritorious might become dangerous and objectionable by reason of other things which it would bring in its train. He felt for a time that associations which were good for himself might not be so good for his sister. There seemed to be a sanctity about her rank which did not attach to his own. He had thought that the Post Office clerk was as good as himself; but he could not assure himself that he was as good as the ladies of his family. Then he had begun to reason with himself on this subject, as he did on all. What was there different in a girl's nature that ought to make her fastidious as to society which he felt to be good enough for himself? In entertaining the feeling which had been strong within him as to that feminine sanctity, was he not giving way to one of those empty prejudices of the world, in opposition to which he had resolved to make a life-long fight? So he had reasoned with himself; but his reason, though it affected his conduct, did not reach his taste. It irked him to think there

should be this marriage, though he was strong in his resolution to uphold his sister,—and, if necessary, to defend her. He had not given way as to the marriage. It had been settled between himself and his sister and his father that there should be no meeting of the lovers at Hendon Hall. He did hope that the engagement might die away, though he was determined to cling to her even though she clung to her lover. This was his state of mind, when this hideous young man, who seemed to have been created with the object of showing him how low a creature a Post Office clerk could be, came across him, and almost convinced him that that other Post Office clerk had been boasting among his official associates of the favours of the high-born lady who had unfortunately become attached to him! He would stick to his politics, to his Radical theories, to his old ideas about social matters generally; but he was almost tempted to declare to himself that women for the present ought to be regarded as exempt from those radical changes which would be good for men. For himself his “order” was a vanity and a delusion; but for his sister it must still be held as containing some bonds. In this frame of mind he determined that he would return to Hendon Hall almost immediately. Further hope of hunting with the Braeside Harriers there was none; and it was necessary for him to see Roden as soon as possible.

That evening at the Castle Lady Amaldina got hold of him, and asked him his advice as to her future duties as a married woman. Lady Amaldina was very fond of little confidences as to her future life, and had as yet found no opportunity of demanding the sympathy of her cousin. Hampstead was not in truth her cousin, but they called each other cousins,—or were called so. None of the Hauteville family felt any of that aversion to the

Radicalism of the heir to the marquisate which the Marchioness entertained. Lady Amaldina delighted to be Amy to Lord Hampstead, and was very anxious to ask him his advice as to Lord Llwdydlw.

"Of course you know all about my marriage, Hampstead?" she said.

"I don't know anything about it," Hampstead replied.

"Oh, Hampstead; how ill-natured!"

"Nobody knows anything about it, because it has'nt taken place."

"That is so like a Radical, to be so precise and rational. My engagement then?"

"Yes; I've heard a great deal about that. We've been talking about that for——how long shall I say?"

"Don't be disagreeable. Of course such a man as Llwdydlw can't be married all in a hurry just like anybody else."

"What a misfortune for him!"

"Why should it be a misfortune?"

"I should think it so if I were going to be married to you."

"That's the prettiest thing I have ever heard you say. At any rate he has got to put up with it, and so have I. It is a bore, because people will talk about nothing else. What do you think of Llwdydlw as a public man?"

"I haven't thought about it. I haven't any means of thinking. I am so completely a private man myself, that I know nothing of public men. I hope he's good at going to sleep."

"Going to sleep?"

"Otherwise it must be so dull, sitting so many hours in the House of Commons. But he's been at it a long time, and I dare say he's used to it."

"Isn't it well that a man in his position should have a regard to his country?"

"Every man ought to have a regard to his country;—but a stronger regard, if it be possible, to the world at large."

Lady Amaldina stared at him, not knowing in the least what he meant. "You are so droll," she said. "You never, I think, think of the position you were born to fill."

"Oh yes, I do. I'm a man, and I think a great deal about it."

"But you've got to be Marquis of Kingsbury, and Llwdythlw has got to be Duke of Merioneth. He never forgets it for a moment."

"What a nuisance for him,—and for you."

"Why should it be a nuisance for me? Cannot a woman understand her duties as well as a man?"

"Quite so, if she knows how to get a glimpse at them."

"I do," said Lady Amaldina, earnestly. "I am always getting glimpses at them. I am quite aware of the functions which it will become me to perform when I am Llwdythlw's wife."

"Mother of his children?"

"I didn't mean that at all, Hampstead. That's all in the hands of the Almighty. But in becoming the future Duchess of Merioneth——"

"That's in the hands of the Almighty, too, isn't it?"

"No; yes. Of course everything is in God's hands."

"The children, the dukedom, and all the estates."

"I never knew any one so provoking," she exclaimed.

"One is at any rate as much as another."

"You don't a bit understand me," she said. "Of course if I go and get married, I do get married."

“And if you have children, you do have children. If you do,—and I hope you will,—I’m sure they’ll be very pretty and well behaved. That will be your duty, and then you’ll have to see that Llwdythlw has what he likes for dinner.”

“I shall do nothing of the kind.”

“Then he’ll dine at the Club, or at the House of Commons. That’s my idea of married life.”

“Nothing beyond that? No community of soul?”

“Certainly not.”

“No!”

“Because you believe in the Trinity, Llwdythlw won’t go to heaven. If he were to take to gambling and drinking you wouldn’t go to the other place.”

“How can you be so horrid.”

“That would be a community of souls,—as souls are understood. A community of interests I hope you will have, and, in order that you may, take care and look after his dinner.” She could not make much more of her cousin in the way of confidence, but she did exact a promise from him, that he would be in attendance at her wedding.

A few days afterwards he returned to Hendon Park, leaving his sister to remain for a fortnight longer at Castle Hautboy.

CHAPTER XV.

MARION FAY AND HER FATHER.

“I SAW him go in a full quarter of an hour since, and Marion Fay went in before. I feel quite sure that she knew that he was expected.” Thus spoke Clara Demijohn to her mother.

"How could she have known it," asked Mrs. Duffer, who was present in Mrs. Demijohn's parlour, where the two younger women were standing with their faces close to the window, with their gloves on and best bonnets, ready for church.

"I am sure she did, because she had made herself smarter than ever with her new brown silk, and her new brown gloves, and her new brown hat,—sly little Quaker that she is. I can see when a girl has made herself up for some special occasion. She wouldn't have put on new gloves surely to go to church with Mrs. Roden."

"If you stay staring there any longer you'll both be late," said Mrs. Demijohn.

"Mrs. Roden hasn't gone yet," said Clara, lingering. It was Sunday morning, and the ladies at No. 10 were preparing for their devotions. Mrs. Demijohn herself never went to church, having some years since had a temporary attack of sciatica, which had provided her with a perpetual excuse for not leaving the house on a Sunday morning. She was always left at home with a volume of Blair's Sermons; but Clara, who was a clever girl, was well aware that more than half a page was never read. She was aware also that great progress was then made with the novel which happened to have last come into the house from the little circulating library round the corner. The ringing of the neighbouring church bell had come to its final tinkling, and Mrs. Duffer knew that she must start, or disgrace herself in the eyes of the pew-opener. "Come, my dear," she said; and away they went. As the door of No. 10 opened so did that of No. 11 opposite, and the four ladies, including Marion Fay, met in the road. "You have a visitor this morning," said Clara.

"Yes;—a friend of my son's."

"We know all about it," said Clara. "Don't you think he's a very fine-looking young man, Miss Fay?"

"Yes, I do," said Marion. "He is certainly a handsome young man."

"Beauty is but skin deep," said Mrs. Duffer.

"But still it goes a long way," said Clara, "particularly with high birth and noble rank."

"He is an excellent young man, as far as I know him," said Mrs. Roden, thinking that she was called upon to defend her son's friend.

Hampstead had returned home on the Saturday, and had taken the earliest opportunity on the following Sunday morning to go over to his friend at Holloway. The distance was about six miles, and he had driven over, sending the vehicle back with the intention of walking home. He would get his friend to walk with him, and then should take place that conversation which he feared would become excessively unpleasant before it was finished. He was shown up to the drawing-room of No. 11, and there he found all alone a young woman whom he had never seen before. This was Marion Fay, the daughter of Zachary Fay, a Quaker, who lived at No. 17, Paradise Row. "I had thought Mrs. Roden was here," he said.

"Mrs. Roden will be down directly. She is putting her bonnet on to go to church."

"And Mr. Roden?" he asked. "He I suppose is not going to church with her?"

"Ah, no; I wish he were. George Roden never goes to church."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"For his mother's sake I was speaking;—but why not for his also? He is not specially my friend, but I

wish well to all men. He is not at home at present, but I understood that he will be here shortly."

"Do you always go to church?" he asked, grounding his question not on any impertinent curiosity as to her observance of her religious duties, but because he had thought from her dress she must certainly be a Quaker.

"I do usually go to your church on a Sunday."

"Nay," said he, "I have no right to claim it as my church. I fear you must regard me also as a heathen,—as you do George Roden."

"I am sorry for that, sir. It cannot be good that any man should be a heathen when so much Christian teaching is abroad. But men I think allow themselves a freedom of thought from which women in their timidity are apt to shrink. If so it is surely good that we should be cowards?" Then the door opened, and Mrs. Roden came into the room.

"George is gone," she said, "to call on a sick friend, but he will be back immediately. He got your letter yesterday evening, and he left word that I was to tell you that he would be back by eleven. Have you introduced yourself to my friend Miss Fay?"

"I had not heard her name," he said smiling, "but we had introduced ourselves."

"Marion Fay is my name," said the girl, "and yours, I suppose is—Lord Hampstead."

"So now we may be supposed to know each other for ever after," he replied, laughing;—"only I fear, Mrs. Roden, that your friend will repudiate the acquaintance because I do not go to church."

"I said not so, Lord Hampstead. The nearer we were to being friends,—if that were possible,—the more I should regret it." Then the two ladies started on their morning duty.

Lord Hampstead when he was alone immediately

decided that he would like to have Marion Fay for a friend, and not the less so because she went to church. He felt that she had been right in saying that audacity in speculation on religious subjects was not becoming a young woman. As it was unfitting that his sister Lady Frances should marry a Post Office clerk, so would it have been unbecoming that Marion Fay should have been what she herself called a heathen. Surely of all the women on whom his eyes had ever rested she was,—he would not say to himself the most lovely,—but certainly the best worth looking at. The close brown bonnet and the little cap, and the well-made brown silk dress, and the brown gloves on her little hands, together made, to his eyes, as pleasing a female attire as a girl could well wear. Could it have been by accident that the graces of her form were so excellently shown? It had to be supposed that she, as a Quaker, was indifferent to outside feminine garniture. It is the theory of a Quaker that she should be so, and in every article she had adhered closely to Quaker rule. As far as he could see there was not a ribbon about her. There was no variety of colour. Her head-dress was as simple and close as any that could have been worn by her grandmother. Hardly a margin of smooth hair appeared between her cap and her forehead. Her dress fitted close to her neck, and on her shoulders she wore a tight-fitting shawl. The purpose in her raiment had been Quaker all through. The exquisite grace must have come altogether by accident,—just because it had pleased nature to make her gracious! As to all this there might perhaps be room for doubt. Whether there had been design or not might possibly afford scope for consideration. But that the grace was there was a matter which required no consideration, and admitted of no doubt.

As Marion Fay will have much to do with our story, it will be well that some further description should be given here of herself and of her condition in life. Zachary Fay, her father, with whom she lived, was a widower with no other living child. There had been many others, who had all died, as had also their mother. She had been a prey to consumption, but had lived long enough to know that she had bequeathed the fatal legacy to her offspring,—to all of them except to Marion, who, when her mother died, had seemed to be exempted from the terrible curse of the family. She had then been old enough to receive her mother's last instructions as to her father, who was then a broken-hearted man struggling with difficulty against the cruelty of Providence. Why should it have been that God should thus afflict him,—him who had no other pleasure in the world, no delights, but those which were afforded to him by the love of his wife and children? It was to be her duty to comfort him, to make up as best she might by her tenderness for all that he had lost and was losing. It was to be especially her duty to soften his heart in all worldly matters, and to turn him as far as possible to the love of heavenly things. It was now two years since her mother's death, and in all things she had endeavoured to perform the duties which her mother had exacted from her.

But Zachary Fay was not a man whom it was easy to turn hither and thither. He was a stern, hard, just man, of whom it may probably be said that if a world were altogether composed of such, the condition of such a world would be much better than that of the world we know;—for generosity is less efficacious towards permanent good than justice, and tender speaking less enduring in its beneficial results than truth. His enemies,

for he had enemies, said of him that he loved money. It was no doubt true; for he that does not love money must be an idiot. He was certainly a man who liked to have what was his own, who would have been irate with any one who had endeavoured to rob him of his own, or had hindered him in his just endeavour to increase his own. That which belonged to another he did not covet,—unless it might be in the way of earning it. Things had prospered with him, and he was—for his condition in life—a rich man. But his worldly prosperity had not for a moment succeeded in lessening the asperity of the blow which had fallen upon him. With all his sternness he was essentially a loving man. To earn money he would say—or perhaps more probably would only think—was the necessity imposed upon man by the Fall of Adam; but to have something warm at his heart, something that should be infinitely dearer to him than himself and all his possessions,—that was what had been left of Divine Essence in a man even after the Fall of Adam. Now the one living thing left for him to love was his daughter Marion.

He was not a man whose wealth was of high order, or his employment of great moment, or he would not probably have been living at Holloway in Paradise Row. He was and had now been for many years senior clerk to Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird, Commission Agents, at the top of King's Court, Old Broad Street. By Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird he was trusted with everything, and had become so amalgamated with the firm as to have achieved in the City almost the credit of a merchant himself. There were some who thought that Zachary Fay must surely be a partner in the house, or he would not have been so well known or so much respected among merchants themselves. But in truth he was no

more than senior clerk, with a salary amounting to four hundred a year. Nor, though he was anxious about his money, would he have dreamed of asking for any increase of his stipend. It was for Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird to say what his services were worth. He would not on any account have lessened his authority with them by becoming a suppliant for increased payment. But for many years he had spent much less than his income, and had known how to use his City experiences in turning his savings to the best account. Thus, as regarded Paradise Row and its neighbourhood, Zachary Fay was a rich man.

He was now old, turned seventy, tall and thin, with long grey hair, with a slight stoop in his shoulders,—but otherwise hale as well as healthy. He went every day to his office, leaving his house with strict punctuality at half-past eight, and entering the door of the counting-house just as the clock struck nine. With equal accuracy he returned home at six, having dined in the middle of the day at an eating-house in the City. All this time was devoted to the interests of the firm, except for three hours on Thursday, during which he attended a meeting in a Quaker house of worship. On these occasions Marion always joined him, making a journey into the City for the purpose. She would fain have induced him also to accompany her on Sundays to the English Church. But to this he never would consent at her instance,—as he had refused to do so at the instance of his wife. He was he said a Quaker, and did not mean to be aught else than a Quaker. In truth, though he was very punctual at those Quaker meetings, he was not at heart a religious man. To go through certain formularies, Quaker though he was, was as sufficient to him as to many other votaries of Church or-

dinances. He had been brought up to attend Quaker meetings, and no doubt would continue to attend them as long as his strength might suffice; but it may be presumed of him without harsh judgment that the price of stocks was often present to his mind during those tedious hours in the meeting-house. In his language he always complied with the strict tenets of his sect, "thou-ing" and "thee-ing" all those whom he addressed; but he had assented to an omission in this matter on the part of his daughter, recognizing the fact that there could be no falsehood in using a mode of language common to all the world. "If a plural pronoun of ignoble sound," so he said, "were used commonly for the singular because the singular was too grand and authoritative for ordinary use, it was no doubt a pity that the language should be so injured; but there could be no untruth in such usage; and it was better that at any rate the young should adhere to the manner of speech which was common among those with whom they lived." Thus Marion was saved from the "thees" and the "thous," and escaped that touch of hypocrisy which seems to permeate the now antiquated speeches of Quakers. Zachary Fay in these latter years of his life was never known to laugh or to joke; but, if circumstances were favourable, he would sometimes fall into a quaint mode of conversation in which there was something of drollery and something also of sarcasm; but this was unfrequent, as Zachary was slow in making new friends, and never conversed after this fashion with the mere acquaintance of the hour.

Of Marion Fay's appearance something has already been said; enough, perhaps,—not to impress any clear idea of her figure on the mind's eye of a reader, for that I regard as a feat beyond the power of any writer,

—but to enable the reader to form a conception of his own. She was small of stature, it should be said, with limbs exquisitely made. It was not the brilliance of her eyes or the chiselled correctness of her features which had struck Hampstead so forcibly as a certain expression of earnest eloquence which pervaded her whole form. And there was a fleeting brightness of colour which went about her cheeks and forehead, and ran around her mouth, which gave to her when she was speaking a brilliance which was hardly to be expected from the ordinary lines of her countenance. Had you been asked, you would have said that she was a brunette,—till she had been worked to some excitement in talking. Then, I think, you would have hardly ventured to describe her complexion by any single word. Lord Hampstead, had he been asked what he thought about her, as he sat waiting for his friend, would have declared that some divinity of grace had been the peculiar gift which had attracted him. And yet that rapid change of colour had not passed unobserved, as she told him that she was sorry that he did not go to church.

Marion Fay's life in Paradise Row would have been very lonely had she not become acquainted with Mrs. Roden before her mother's death. Now hardly a day passed but what she spent an hour with that lady. They were, indeed, fast friends,—so much so that Mrs. Vincent had also come to know Marion, and approving of the girl's religious tendencies had invited her to spend two or three days at Wimbledon. This was impossible, because Marion would never leave her father;—but she had once or twice gone over with Mrs. Roden, when she made her weekly call, and had certainly ingratiated herself with the austere lady. Other society she had none, nor did she seem to desire it. Clara Demijohn, seeing

the intimacy which had been struck up between Marion and Mrs. Roden,—as to which she had her own little jealousies to endure,—was quite sure that Marion was setting her cap at the Post Office clerk, and had declared in confidence to Mrs. Duffer that the girl was doing it in the most brazen-faced manner. Clara had herself on more than one occasion contrived to throw herself in the clerk's way on his return homewards on dusky evenings,—perhaps intent only on knowing what might be the young man's intentions as to Marion Fay. The young man had been courteous to her, but she had declared to Mrs. Duffer that he was one of those stiff young men who don't care for ladies' society. "These are they," said Mrs. Duffer, "who marry the readiest and make the best husbands." "Oh;—she'll go on sticking to him till she don't leave a stone unturned," said Clara,—thereby implying that, as far as she was concerned, she did not think it worth her while to continue her attacks unless a young man would give way to her at once. George had been asked more than once to drink tea at No. 10, but had been asked in vain. Clara, therefore, had declared quite loudly that Marion had made an absolute prisoner of him,—had bound him hand and foot,—would not let him call his life his own. "She interrupts him constantly as he comes from the office," she said to Mrs. Duffer; "I call that downright unfeminine audacity." Yet she knew that Mrs. Duffer knew that she had intercepted the young man. Mrs. Duffer took it all in good part, knowing very well how necessary it is that a young woman should fight her own battle strenuously.

In the mean time Marion Fay and George Roden were good friends. "He is engaged;—I must not say to whom," Mrs. Roden had said to her young friend. "It

will, I fear, be a long, long, tedious affair. You must not speak of it."

"If she be true to him, I hope he will be true to her," said Marion, with true feminine excitement.

"I only fear that he will be too true."

"No, no;—that cannot be. Even though he suffer let him be true. You may be sure I will not mention it,—to him, or to any one. I like him so well that I do hope he may not suffer much." From that time she found herself able to regard George Roden as a real friend, and to talk to him as though there need be no cause for dreading intimacy. With an engaged man a girl may suffer herself to be intimate.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WALK BACK TO HENDON.

"I was here a little early," said Hampstead when his friend came in, "and I found your mother just going to church,—with a friend."

"Marion Fay."

"Yes, Miss Fay."

"She is the daughter of a Quaker who lives a few doors off. But though she is a Quaker she goes to church as well. I envy the tone of mind of those who are able to find a comfort in pouring themselves out in gratitude to the great Unknown God."

"I pour myself out in gratitude," said Hampstead; "but with me it is an affair of solitude."

"I doubt whether you ever hold yourself for two hours in commune with heavenly power and heavenly influence. Something more than gratitude is necessary. You must conceive that there is a duty,—by the non-

performance of which you would encounter peril. Then comes the feeling of safety which always follows the performance of a duty. That I never can achieve. What did you think of Marion Fay?"

"She is a most lovely creature."

"Very pretty, is she not; particularly when speaking?"

"I never care for female beauty that does not display itself in action,—either speaking, moving, laughing, or perhaps only frowning," said Hampstead enthusiastically. "I was talking the other day to a sort of cousin of mine who has a reputation of being a remarkably handsome young woman. She had ever so much to say to me, and when I was in company with her a page in buttons kept coming into the room. He was a round-faced, high-checked, ugly boy; but I thought him so much better-looking than my cousin, because he opened his mouth when he spoke, and showed his eagerness by his eyes."

"Your cousin is complimented."

"She has made her market, so it does not signify. The Greeks seem to me to have regarded form without expression. I doubt whether Phidias would have done much with your Miss Fay. To my eyes she is the perfection of loveliness."

"She is not my Miss Fay. She is my mother's friend."

"Your mother is lucky. A woman without vanity, without jealousy, without envy——"

"Where will you find one?"

"Your mother. Such a woman as that can, I think, enjoy feminine loveliness almost as much as a man."

"I have often heard my mother speak of Marion's good qualities, but not much of her loveliness. To me her great charm is her voice. She speaks musically."

"As one can fancy Melpomene did. Does she come here often?"

"Every day, I fancy;—but not generally when I am here. Not but what she and I are great friends. She will sometimes go with me into town on a Thursday morning, on her way to the meeting house."

"Lucky fellow!" Roden shrugged his shoulders as though conscious that any luck of that kind must come to him from another quarter, if it came at all.

"What does she talk about?"

"Religion generally."

"And you?"

"Anything else, if she will allow me. She would wish to convert me. I am not at all anxious to convert her, really believing that she is very well as she is."

"Yes," said Hampstead; "that is the worst of what we are apt to call advanced opinions. With all my self-assurance I never dare to tamper with the religious opinions of those who are younger or weaker than myself. I feel that they at any rate are safe if they are in earnest. No one, I think, has ever been put in danger by believing Christ to be a God."

"They none of them know what they believe," said Roden; "nor do you or I. Men talk of belief as though it were a settled thing. It is so but with few; and that only with those who lack imagination. What sort of a time did you have down at Castle Hautboy?"

"Oh,—I don't know,—pretty well. Everybody was very kind, and my sister likes it. The scenery is lovely. You can look up a long reach of Ulleswater from the Castle terrace, and there is Helvellyn in the distance. The house was full of people,—who despised me more than I did them."

"Which is saying a great deal, perhaps."

"There were some uncommon apes. One young lady, not very young, asked me what I meant to do with all

the land in the world when I took it away from everybody. I told her that when it was all divided equally there would be a nice little estate even for all the daughters, and that in such circumstances all the sons would certainly get married. She acknowledged that such a result would be excellent, but she did not believe in it. A world in which the men should want to marry was beyond her comprehension. I went out hunting one day."

"The hunting I should suppose was not very good."

"But for one drawback it would have been very good indeed."

"The mountains, I should have thought, would be one drawback, and the lakes another."

"Not at all. I liked the mountains because of their echoes, and the lakes did not come in our way."

"Where was the fault?"

"There came a man."

"Whom you disliked?"

"Who was a bore."

"Could you not shut him up?"

"No; nor shake him off. I did at last do that, but it was by turning round and riding backwards when we were coming home. I had just invited him to ride on while I stood still,—but he wouldn't."

"Did it come to that?"

"Quite to that. I actually turned tail and ran away from him;—not as we ordinarily do in society when we sneak off under some pretence, leaving the pretender to think that he has made himself very pleasant; but with a full declaration of my opinion and intention."

"Who was he?"

That was the question. Hampstead had come there on purpose to say who the man was,—and to talk about

the man with great freedom. And he was determined to do so. But he preferred not to begin that which he intended to be a severe accusation against his friend till they were walking together, and he did not wish to leave the house without saying a word further about Marion Fay. It was his intention to dine all alone at Hendon Hall. How much nicer it would be if he could dine in Paradise Row with Marion Fay! He knew it was Mrs. Roden's custom to dine early, after church, on Sundays, so that the two maidens who made up her establishment might go out,—either to church or to their lovers, or perhaps to both, as might best suit them. He had dined there once or twice already, eating the humble, but social, leg of mutton of Holloway, in preference to the varied, but solitary, banquet of Hendon. He was of opinion that really intimate acquaintance demanded the practice of social feeling. To know a man very well, and never to sit at table with him, was, according to his views of life, altogether unsatisfactory. Though the leg of mutton might be cold, and have no other accompaniment but the common ill-boiled potato, yet it would be better than any banquet prepared simply for the purpose of eating. He was gregarious, and now felt a longing, of which he was almost ashamed, to be admitted to the same pastures with Marion Fay. There was not, however, the slightest reason for supposing that Marion Fay would dine at No. 11, even were he asked to do so himself. Nothing, in fact, could be less probable, as Marion Fay never deserted her father. Nor did he like to give any hint to his friend that he was desirous of further immediate intimacy with Marion. There would be an absurdity in doing so which he did not dare to perpetrate. Only if he could have passed the morning in Paradise Row, and then have walked home with Roden

in the dark evening, he could, he thought, have said what he had to say very conveniently.

But it was impossible. He sat silent for some minute or two after Roden had asked the name of the bore of the hunting field, and then answered him by proposing that they should start together on their walk towards Hendon. "I am all ready; but you must tell me the name of this dreadful man."

"As soon as we have started I will. I have come here on purpose to tell you."

"To tell me the name of the man you ran away from in Cumberland?"

"Exactly that;—come along." And so they started, more than an hour before the time at which Marion Fay would return from church. "The man who annoyed me so out hunting was an intimate friend of yours."

"I have not an intimate friend in the world except yourself."

"Not Marion Fay?"

"I meant among men. I do not suppose that Marion Fay was out hunting in Cumberland."

"I should not have ran away from her, I think, if she had. It was Mr. Crocker, of the General Post Office."

"Crocker in Cumberland?"

"Certainly he was in Cumberland—unless some one personated him. I met him dining at Castle Hautboy, when he was kind enough to make himself known to me, and again out hunting,—when he did more than make himself known to me."

"I am surprised."

"Is he not away on leave?"

"Oh, yes;—he is away on leave. I do not doubt that it was he."

"Why should he not be in Cumberland,—when, as it

happens, his father is land-steward or something of that sort to my uncle Persiflage?"

"Because I did not know that he had any connection with Cumberland. Why not Cumberland, or Westmoreland, or Northumberland, you may say? Why not?—or Yorkshire, or Lincolnshire, or Norfolk? I certainly did not suppose that a Post Office clerk out on his holidays would be found hunting in any county."

"You have never heard of his flea-bitten horse?"

"Not a word. I didn't know that he had ever sat upon a horse. And now will you let me know why you have called him my friend?"

"Is he not so?"

"By no means."

"Does he not sit at the same desk with you?"

"Certainly he does."

"I think I should be friends with a man if I sat at the same desk with him."

"With Crocker even?" asked Roden.

"Well; he might be an exception."

"But if an exception to you, why not also an exception to me? As it happens, Crocker has made himself disagreeable to me. Instead of being my friend, he is,—I will not say my enemy, because I should be making too much of him; but nearer to being so than any one I know. Now, what is the meaning of all this? Why did he trouble you especially down in Cumberland? Why do you call him my friend? And why do you wish to speak to me about him?"

"He introduced himself to me, and told me that he was your special friend."

"Then he lied."

"I should not have cared about that;—but he did more."

"What more did he do?"

"I would have been courteous to him,—if only because he sat at the same desk with you;—but——"

"But what?"

"There are things which are difficult to be told."

"If they have to be told, they had better be told," said Roden, almost angrily.

"Whether friend or not, he knew of——your engagement with my sister."

"Impossible!"

"He told me of it," said Lord Hampstead impetuously, his tongue now at length loosed. "Told me of it! He spoke of it again and again to my extreme disgust. Though the thing had been fixed as Fate, he should not have mentioned it."

"Certainly not."

"But he did nothing but tell me of your happiness, and good luck, and the rest of it. It was impossible to stop him, so that I had to ride away from him. I bade him be silent,—as plainly as I could without mentioning Fanny's name. But it was of no use."

"How did he know it?"

"You told him!"

"I!"

"So he said." This was not strictly the case. Crocker had so introduced the subject as to have avoided the palpable lie of declaring that the tidings had been absolutely given by Roden to himself. But he had not the less falsely intended to convey that impression to Hampstead, and had conveyed it. "He gave me to understand that you were speaking about it continually at your office." Roden turned round and looked at the other man, white with rage—as though he could not allow himself to utter a word. "It was as I tell you. He

began it at the Castle, and afterwards continued it whenever he could get near me when hunting."

"And you believed him?"

"When he repeated his story so often what was I to do?"

"Knock him off his horse."

"And so be forced to speak of my sister to every one in the hunt and in the county? You do not feel how much is due to a girl's name."

"I think I do. I think that of all men I am the most likely to feel what is due to the name of Lady Frances Trafford. Of course I never mentioned it to any one at the Post Office."

"From whom had he heard it?"

"How can I answer that? Probably through some of your own family. It has made its way through Lady Kingsbury to Castle Hautboy, and has then been talked about. I am not responsible for that."

"Not for that certainly,—if it be so."

"Nor because such a one as he has lied. You should not have believed it of me."

"I was bound to ask you."

"You were bound to tell me, but should not have asked me. There are things which do not require asking. What must I do with him?"

"Nothing. Nothing can be done. You could not touch the subject without alluding to my sister. She is coming back to Hendon in another week."

"She was there before, but I did not see her."

"Of course you did not see her. How should you?"

"Simply by going there."

"She would not have seen you." There came a black frown over Roden's brow as he heard this. "It has been understood between my father and Fanny and myself

that you should not come to Hendon while she is living with me."

"Should not I have been a party to that agreement?"

"Hardly, I think. This agreement must have been made whether you assented or not. On no other terms would my father have permitted her to come. It was most desirable that she should be separated from Lady Kingsbury."

"Oh, yes."

"And therefore the agreement was advisable. I would not have had her on any other terms."

"Why not?"

"Because I think that such visitings would have been unwise. It is no use my blinking it to you. I do not believe that the marriage is practicable."

"I do."

"As I don't, of course I cannot be a party to throwing you together. Were you to persist in coming you would only force me to find a home for her elsewhere."

"I have not disturbed you."

"You have not. Now I want you to promise me that you will not. I have assured my father that it shall be so. Will you say that you will neither come to her at Hendon Hall, or write to her, while she is staying with me?" He paused on the road for an answer, but Roden walked on without making one, and Hampstead was forced to accompany him. "Will you promise me?"

"I will not promise. I will do nothing which may possibly subject me to be called a liar. I have no wish to knock at any door at which I do not think myself to be welcome."

"You know how welcome you would be at mine, but for her."

"It might be that I should find myself forced to en-

deavour to see her, and I will therefore make no promise. A man should fetter himself by no assurances of that kind as to his conduct. If a man be a drunkard, it may be well that he should bind himself by a vow against drinking. But he who can rule his own conduct should promise nothing. Good-day now. I must be back to dinner with my mother."

Then he took his leave somewhat abruptly, and returned. Hampstead went on to Hendon with his thoughts sometimes fixed on his sister, sometimes on Roden, whom he regarded as impracticable, sometimes on that horrid Crocker;—but more generally on Marion Fay, whom he resolved that he must see again, whatever might be the difficulties in his way.

CHAPTER XVII.

LORD HAMPSTEAD'S SCHEME.

DURING the following week Hampstead went down to Gorse Hall, and hunted two or three days with various packs of hounds within his reach, declaring to himself that, after all, Leicestershire was better than Cumberland, because he was known there, and no one would dare to treat him as Crocker had done. Never before had his democratic spirit received such a shock,—or rather the remnant of that aristocratic spirit which he had striven to quell by the wisdom and humanity of democracy! That a stranger should have dared to talk to him about one of the ladies of his family! No man certainly would do so in Northamptonshire or Leicestershire. He could not quite explain to himself the difference in the localities, but he was quite sure that he was safe from anything of that kind at Gorse Hall.

But he had other matters to think of as he galloped

about the country. How might he best manage to see Marion Fay? His mind was set upon that;—or, perhaps, more dangerously still, his heart. Had he been asked before he would have said that there could have been nothing more easy than for such a one as he to make acquaintance with a young lady in Paradise Row. But now, when he came to look at it, he found that Marion Fay was environed with fortifications and a *chevaux-de-frise* of difficulties which were apparently impregnable. He could not call at No. 17, and simply ask for Miss Fay. To do so he must be a proficient in that impudence, the lack of which created so many difficulties for him. He thought of finding out the Quaker chapel in the City, and there sitting out the whole proceeding,—unless desired to leave the place,—with the Quixotic idea of returning to Holloway with her in an omnibus. As he looked at this project all round, he became sure that the joint journey in an omnibus would never be achieved. Then he imagined that Mrs. Roden might perhaps give him aid. But with what a face could such a one as he ask such a one as Mrs. Roden to assist him in such an enterprise? And yet, if anything were to be done, it must be done through Mrs. Roden,—or, at any rate, through Mrs. Roden's house. As to this too there was a new difficulty. He had not actually quarrelled with George Roden, but the two had parted on the road as though there were some hitch in the cordiality of their friendship. He had been rebuked for having believed what Crocker had told him. He did acknowledge to himself that he should not have believed it. Though Crocker's lies had been monstrous, he should rather have supposed him to be guilty even of lies so monstrous, than have suspected his friend of conduct that would certainly have been base. Even this added some-

thing to the difficulties by which Marion Fay was surrounded.

Vivian was staying with him at Gorse Hall. "I shall go up to London to-morrow," he said, as the two of them were riding home after hunting on the Saturday,—the Saturday after the Sunday on which Hampstead had been in Paradise Row.

"To-morrow is Sunday,—no day for travelling," said Vivian. "The Fitzwilliams are at Lilford Cross Roads on Monday,—draw back towards the kennels;—afternoon train up from Peterborough at 5:30;—branch from Oundle to meet it, 4:50—have your traps sent there. It's all arranged by Providence. On Monday evening I go to Gatcombe,—so that it will all fit."

"You need not be disturbed. A solitary Sunday will enable you to write all your official correspondence for the fortnight."

"That I should have done, even in your presence."

"I must be at home on Monday morning. Give my love to them all at Lilford Cross Roads. I shall be down again before long if my sister can spare me;—or perhaps I may induce her to come and rough it here for a week or two." He was as good as his word, and travelled up to London, and thence across to Hendon Hall, on the Sunday.

It might have been said that no young man could have had stronger inducements for clinging to his sport, or fewer reasons for abandoning it. His stables were full of horses; the weather was good; the hunting had been excellent; his friends were all around him; and he had nothing else to do. His sister intended to remain for yet another week at Castle Hautboy, and Hendon Hall of itself had certainly no special attractions at the end of November. But Marion Fay was on his mind,

and he had arranged his scheme. His scheme, as far as he knew, would be as practicable on a Tuesday as on a Monday; but he was impatient, and for the nonce preferred Marion Fay, whom he probably would not find, to the foxes which would certainly be found in the neighbourhood of Lilford Cross Roads.

It was not much of a scheme after all. He would go over to Paradise Row, and call on Mrs. Roden. He would then explain to her what had taken place between him and George, and leave some sort of apology for the offended Post Office clerk. Then he would ask them both to come over and dine with him on some day before his sister's return. In what way Marion Fay's name might be introduced, or how she might be brought into the arrangement, he must leave to the chapter of accidents. On the Monday he left home at about two o'clock, and making a roundabout journey *viâ* Baker Street, King's Cross, and Islington, went down to Holloway by an omnibus. He had become somewhat abashed and perplexed as to his visits to Paradise Row, having learned to entertain a notion that some of the people there looked at him. It was hard, he thought, that if he had a friend in that or any other street he should not be allowed to visit his friend without creating attention. He was not aware of the special existence of Mrs. Demijohn, or of Clara, or of Mrs. Duffer, nor did he know from what window exactly the eyes of curious inhabitants were fixed upon him. But he was conscious that an interest was taken in his comings and goings. As long as his acquaintance in the street was confined to the inhabitants of No. 11, this did not very much signify. Though the neighbours should become aware that he was intimate with Mrs. Roden or her son, he need not care much about that. But if he should succeed in

adding Marion Fay to the number of his Holloway friends, then he thought inquisitive eyes might be an annoyance. It was on this account that he made his way down in an omnibus, and felt that there was something almost of hypocrisy in the soft, unpretending, and almost skulking manner in which he crept up Paradise Row, as though his walking there was really of no moment to any one. As he looked round after knocking at Mrs. Roden's door, he saw the figure of Clara Demijohn standing a little back from the parlour window of the house opposite.

"Mrs. Roden is at home," said the maid, "but there are friends with her." Nevertheless she showed the young lord up to the drawing-room. There were friends indeed. It was Mrs. Vincent's day for coming, and she was in the room. That alone would not have been much, but with the two elder ladies was seated Marion Fay. So far at any rate Fortune had favoured him. But now there was a difficulty in explaining his purpose. He could not very well give his general invitation,—general at any rate as regarded Marion Fay,—before Mrs. Vincent.

Of course there was an introduction. Mrs. Vincent, who had often heard Lord Hampstead's name, in spite of her general severity, was open to the allurements of nobility. She was glad to meet the young man, although she had strong reasons for believing that he was not a tower of strength on matters of Faith. Hampstead and Marion Fay shook hands as though they were old friends, and then the conversation naturally fell upon George Roden.

"You didn't expect my son, I hope," said the mother.

"Oh, dear no! I had a message to leave for him, which will do just as well in a note."

This was to some extent unfortunate, because it

made both Mrs. Vincent and Marion feel that they were in the way.

"I think I'll send Betsy down for the brougham," said the former. The brougham which brought Mrs. Vincent was always in the habit of retiring round the corner to the "Duchess of Edinburgh," where the driver had succeeded in creating for himself quite an intimacy.

"Pray do not stir, madam," said Hampstead, for he had perceived from certain preparations made by Miss Fay that she would find it necessary to follow Mrs. Vincent out of the room. "I will write two words for Roden, and that will tell him all I have to say."

Then the elder ladies went back to the matter they were discussing before Lord Hampstead had appeared. "I was asking this young lady," said Mrs. Vincent, "to come with me for two or three days down to Brighton. It is absolutely the fact that she has never seen Brighton."

As Mrs. Vincent went to Brighton twice annually, for a month at the beginning of the winter and then again for a fortnight in the spring, it seemed to her a wonderful thing that any one living, even at Holloway, should never have seen the place.

"I think it would be a very good thing," said Mrs. Roden,— "if your father can spare you."

"I never leave my father," said Marion.

"Don't you think, my lord," said Mrs. Vincent, "that she looks as though she wanted a change?"

Authorized by this, Lord Hampstead took the opportunity of gazing at Marion, and was convinced that the young lady wanted no change at all. There was certainly no room for improvement; but it occurred to him on the spur of the moment that he, too, might spend

two or three days at Brighton, and that he might find his opportunities there easier than in Paradise Row. "Yes, indeed," he said, "a change is always good. I never like to stay long in one place myself."

"Some people must stay in one place," said Marion with a smile. "Father has to go to his business, and would be very uncomfortable if there were no one to give him his meals and sit at table with him."

"He could spare you for a day or two," said Mrs. Roden, who knew that it would be well for Marion that she should sometimes be out of London.

"I am sure that he would not begrudge you a short recreation like that," said Mrs. Vincent.

"He never begrudges me anything. We did go down to Cowes for a fortnight in April, though I am quite sure that papa himself would have preferred remaining at home all the time. He does not believe in the new-fangled idea of changing the air."

"Doesn't he?" said Mrs. Vincent. "I do, I know. Where I live, at Wimbledon, may be said to be more country than town; but if I were to remain all the year without moving, I should become so low and out of sorts, that I veritably believe they would have to bury me before the first year was over."

"Father says that when he was young it was only people of rank and fashion who went out of town regularly; and that folk lived as long then as they do now."

"I think people get used to living and dying according to circumstances," said Hampstead. "Our ancestors did a great many things which we regard as quite fatal. They drank their water without filtering it, and ate salt meat all the winter through. They did very little in the washing way, and knew nothing of ventilation. Yet

they contrived to live." Marion Fay, however, was obstinate, and declared her purpose of declining Mrs. Vincent's kind invitation. There was a good deal more said about it, because Hampstead managed to make various propositions. "He was very fond of the sea himself," he said, "and would take them all round, including Mrs. Vincent and Mrs. Roden, in his yacht, if not to Brighton, at any rate to Cowes." December was not exactly the time for yachting, and as Brighton could be reached in an hour by railway, he was driven to abandon that proposition with a little laughter at his own absurdity.

But it was all done with a gaiety and a kindness which quite won Mrs. Vincent's heart. She stayed considerably beyond her accustomed hour, to the advantage of the proprietor of the "Duchess of Edinburgh," and at last sent Betsy down to the corner in high good humour. "I declare, Lord Hampstead," she said, "I ought to charge you three-and-sixpence before I go. I shall have to break into another hour, because I have stayed talking to you. Pritchard never lets me off if I am not back punctually by four." Then she took her departure.

"You needn't go, Marion," said Mrs. Roden,— "unless Lord Hampstead has something special to say to me." Lord Hampstead declared that he had nothing special to say, and Marion did not go.

"But I have something special to say," said Hampstead, when the elder lady was quite gone, "but Miss Fay may know it just as well as yourself. As we were walking to Hendon on Sunday a matter came up as to which George and I did not agree."

"There was no quarrel, I hope?" said the mother.

"Oh, dear, no;—but we weren't best pleased with each other. Therefore I want you both to come and

dine with me one day this week. I shall be engaged on Saturday, but any day before that will do." Mrs. Roden put on a very serious look on receiving the proposition, having never before been invited to the house of her son's friend. Nor, for some years past, had she dined out with any acquaintance. And yet she could not think at the moment of any reason why she should not do so. "I was going to ask Miss Fay to come with you."

"Oh, quite impossible," said Marion. "It is very kind, my lord; but I never go out, do I, Mrs. Roden?"

"That seems to me a reason why you should begin. Of course, I understand about your father. But I should be delighted to make his acquaintance, if you would bring him."

"He rarely goes out, Lord Hampstead."

"Then he will have less power to plead that he is engaged. What do you say, Mrs. Roden? It would give me the most unaffected pleasure. Like your father, Miss Fay, I, too, am unaccustomed to much going out, as you call it. I am as peculiar as he is. Let us acknowledge that we are all peculiar people, and that therefore there is the more reason why we should come together. Mrs. Roden, do not try to prevent an arrangement which will give me the greatest pleasure, and to which there cannot be any real objection. Why should not Mr. Fay make acquaintance with your son's friend? Which day would suit you best, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday?"

At last it was settled that at any rate George Roden should dine at Hendon Hall on the Friday,—he being absent during the discussion,—and that time must be taken as to any further acceptance of the invitation. Mrs. Roden was inclined to think that it had best be regarded as impossible. She thought that she had made

up her mind never to dine out again. Then there came across her mind a remembrance that her son was engaged to marry this young man's sister, and that it might be for his welfare that she should give way to these overtures of friendship. When her thoughts had travelled so far as this, she might have felt sure that the invitation would at last be accepted.

As to Marion Fay, the subject was allowed to drop without any further decision. She had said that it was impossible, and she said nothing more. That was the last dictum heard from her; but it was not repeated as would probably have been the case had she been quite sure that it was impossible. Mrs. Roden during the interview did not allude to that branch of the subject again. She was fluttered with what had already been said, a little angry with herself that she had so far yielded, a little perplexed at her own too evident confusion, a little frightened at Lord Hampstead's evident admiration of the girl. As to Marion, it must, of course, be left to her father,—as would the question as to the Quaker himself.

"I had better be going," said Marion Fay, who was also confused.

"So must I," said Hampstead. "I have to return round by London, and have ever so many things to do in Park Lane. The worst of having two or three houses is that one never knows where one's clothes are. Good-bye, Mrs. Roden. Mind, I depend upon you, and that I have set my heart upon it. You will let me walk with you as far as your door, Miss Fay?"

"It is only three doors off," said Marion, "and in the other direction." Nevertheless he did go with her to the house, though it was only three doors off. "Tell your father, with my compliments," he said, "that

George Roden can show you the way over. If you can get a cab to bring you across I will send you back in the waggonette. For the matter of that, there is no reason on earth why it should not be sent for you."

"Oh, no, my lord. That is, I do not think it possible that we should come."

"Pray do, pray do, pray do," he said, as he took her hand when the door at No. 17 was opened. As he walked down the street he saw the figure still standing at the parlour window of No. 10.

On the same evening Clara Demijohn was closeted with Mrs. Duffer at her lodgings at No. 15. "Standing in the street, squeezing her hand!" said Mrs. Duffer, as though the very hairs of her head were made to stand on end by the tidings,—the moral hairs, that is, of her moral head. Her head, in the flesh, was ornamented by a front which must have prevented the actual standing on end of any hair that was left to her.

"I saw it! They came out together from No. 11 as loving as could be, and he walked up with her to their own house. Then he seized her hand and held it,—oh, for minutes!—in the street. There is nothing those Quaker girls won't allow themselves. They are so free with their Christian names, that, of course, they get into intimacies instantly. I never allow a young man to call me Clara without leave asked and given."

"I should think not."

"One can't be too particular about one's Christian name. They've been in there together, at No. 11, for two hours. What can that mean? Old Mrs. Vincent was there, but she went away."

"I suppose she didn't like such doings."

"What can a lord be doing in such a place as that," asked Clara, "—coming so often, you know? And one

that has to be a Markiss, which is much more than a lord. One thing is quite certain. It can't mean that he is going to marry Marion Fay?" With this assurance Clara Demijohn comforted herself as best she might.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW THEY LIVED AT TRAFFORD PARK.

THERE certainly was no justification for the ill-humour which Lady Kingsbury displayed to her husband because Hampstead and his sister had been invited down to Castle Hautboy. The Hautboy people were her own relations,—not her husband's. If Lady Persiflage had taken upon herself to think better of all the evil things done by the children of the first Marchioness, that was not the fault of the Marquis! But to her thinking this visit had been made in direct opposition to her wishes and her interests. Had it been possible she would have sent the naughty young lord and the naughty young lady altogether to Coventry,—as far as all aristocratic associations were concerned. This encouragement of them at Castle Hautboy was in direct contravention of her ideas. But poor Lord Kingsbury had had nothing to do with it. "They are not fit to go to such a house as Castle Hautboy," she said. The Marquis, who was sitting alone in his own morning room at Trafford, frowned angrily. But her ladyship, too, was very angry. "They have disgraced themselves, and Geraldine should not have received them."

There were two causes for displeasure in this. In the first place the Marquis could not endure that such hard things should be said of his elder children. Then, by the very nature of the accusation made, there was a certain special honour paid to the Hauteville family

which he did not think at all to be their due. On many occasions his wife had spoken as though her sister had married into a House of peculiar nobility,—because, forsooth, Lord Persiflage was in the Cabinet, and was supposed to have made a figure in politics. The Marquis was not at all disposed to regard the Earl as in any way bigger than was he himself. He could have paid all the Earl's debts,—which the Earl certainly could not do himself,—and never have felt it. The social gatherings at Castle Hautboy were much more numerous than any at Trafford, but the guests at Castle Hautboy were often people whom the Marquis would never have entertained. His wife pined for the social influence which her sister was supposed to possess, but he felt no sympathy with his wife in that respect.

"I deny it," said the father, rising from his chair, and scowling at his wife as he stood leaning upon the table. "They have not disgraced themselves."

"I say they have." Her ladyship made her assertion boldly, having come into the room prepared for battle, and determined if possible to be victor. "Has not Fanny disgraced herself in having engaged herself to a low fellow, the scum of the earth, without saying anything even to you about it?"

"No!" shouted the Marquis, who was resolved to contradict his wife in anything she might say.

"Then I know nothing of what becomes a young woman," continued the Marchioness. "And does not Hampstead associate with all manner of low people?"

"No, never."

"Is not this George Roden a low person? Does he ever live with young men or with ladies of his own rank?"

"And yet you're angry with him because he goes to

Castle Hautboy! Though, no doubt, he may meet people there quite unfit for society."

"That is not true," said the Marchioness. "My brother-in-law entertains the best company in Europe."

"He did do so when he had my son and my daughter under his roof."

"Hampstead does not belong to a single club in London," said the stepmother.

"So much the better," said the father, "as far as I know anything about the clubs. Hautboy lost fourteen hundred pounds the other day at the Pandemonium; and where did the money come from to save him from being expelled?"

"That's a very old story," said the Marchioness, who knew that her husband and Hampstead between them had supplied the money to save the young lad from disgrace.

"And yet you throw it in my teeth that Hampstead doesn't belong to any club! There isn't a club in London he couldn't get into to-morrow, if he were to put his name down."

"I wish he'd try at the Carlton," said her ladyship, whose father and brother, and all her cousins, belonged to that aristocratic and exclusive political association.

"I should disown him," said the still Liberal Marquis;—"that is to say, of course he'll do nothing of the kind. But to declare that a young man has disgraced himself because he doesn't care for club life, is absurd;—and coming from you as his stepmother is wicked." As he said this he bobbed his head at her, looking into her face as though he should say to her, "Now you have my true opinion about yourself." At this moment there came a gentle knock at the door, and Mr. Greenwood put in his head. "I am busy," said the Marquis very angrily.

Then the unhappy chaplain retired abashed to his own rooms, which were also on the ground floor, beyond that in which his patron was now sitting.

"My lord," said his wife, towering in her passion, "if you call me wicked in regard to your children, I will not continue to live under the same roof with you."

"Then you may go away."

"I have endeavoured to do my duty by your children, and a very hard time I've had of it. If you think that your daughter is now conducting herself with propriety, I can only wash my hands of her."

"Wash your hands," he said.

"Very well. Of course I must suffer deeply, because the shadow of the disgrace must fall more or less upon my own darlings."

"Bother the darlings," said the Marquis.

"They're your own children, my lord; your own children."

"Of course they are. Why shouldn't they be my own children? They are doing very well, and will get quite as good treatment as younger brothers ought to have."

"I don't believe you care for them the least in the world," said the Marchioness.

"That is not true. You know I care for them."

"You said 'bother the darlings' when I spoke of them." Here the poor mother sobbed, almost overcome by the contumely of the expression used towards her own offspring.

"You drive a man to say anything. Now look here. I will not have Hampstead and Fanny abused in my presence. If there be anything wrong I must suffer more than you, because they are my children. You have made it impossible for her to live here——"

"I haven't made it impossible for her to live here. I have only done my duty by her. Ask Mr. Greenwood."

"D—— Mr. Greenwood!" said the Marquis. He certainly did say the word at full length, as far as it can be said to have length, and with all the emphasis of which it was capable. He certainly did say it, though when the circumstance was afterwards not unfrequently thrown in his teeth, he would forget it and deny it. Her ladyship heard the word very plainly, and at once stalked out of the room, thereby showing that her feminine feelings had received a wrench which made it impossible for her any longer to endure the presence of such a foul-mouthed monster. Up to that moment she had been anything but the victor; but the vulgarity of the curse had restored to her much of her prestige, so that she was able to leave the battlefield as one retiring with all his forces in proper order. He had "bothered" his own children, and "damned" his own chaplain!

The Marquis sat awhile thinking alone, and then pulled a string by which communication was made between his room and that in which the clergyman sat. It was not a vulgar bell, which would have been injurious to the reverence and dignity of a clerical friend, as savouring of a menial's task work, nor was it a pipe for oral communication, which is undignified, as requiring a man to stoop and put his mouth to it,—but an arrangement by which a light tap was made against the wall so that the inhabitant of the room might know that he was wanted without any process derogatory to his self-respect. The chaplain obeyed the summons, and, lightly knocking at the door, again stood before the lord. He found the Marquis standing upon the hearth-rug, by which, as he well knew, it was signified that he was not intended to sit down. "Mr. Greenwood," said the Mar-

quis, in a tone of voice which was intended to be peculiarly mild, but which at the same time was felt to be menacing, "I do not mean at the present moment to have any conversation with you on the subject to which it is necessary that I should allude, and as I shall not ask for your presence for above a minute or two, I will not detain you by getting you to sit down. If I can induce you to listen to me without replying to me it will, I think, be better for both of us."

"Certainly, my lord."

"I will not have you speak to me respecting Lady Frances."

"When have I done so?" asked the chaplain plaintively.

"Nor will I have you speak to Lady Kingsbury about her stepdaughter." Then he was silent, and seemed to imply, by what he had said before, that the clergyman should now leave the room. The first order given had been very simple. It was one which the Marquis certainly had a right to exact, and with which Mr. Greenwood felt that he would be bound to comply. But the other was altogether of a different nature. He was in the habit of constant conversation with Lady Kingsbury as to Lady Frances. Twice, three times, four times a day her ladyship, who in her present condition had no other confidant, would open out her sorrow to him on this terrible subject. Was he to tell her that he had been forbidden by his employer to continue this practice, or was he to continue it in opposition to the Marquis's wishes? He would have been willing enough to do as he was bidden, but that he saw that he would be driven to quarrel with the lord or the lady. The lord, no doubt, could turn him out of the house, but the lady could make the house too hot to hold him. The lord was a just man, though unreasonable, and would probably not turn him out without

compensation; but the lady was a violent woman, who if she were angered would remember nothing of justice. Thinking of all this he stood distracted and vacillating before his patron. "I expect you," said the Marquis, "to comply with my wishes,—or to leave me."

"To leave Trafford?" asked the poor man.

"Yes; to leave Trafford; to do that or to comply with my wishes on a matter as to which my wishes are certainly entitled to consideration. Which is it to be, Mr. Greenwood?"

"Of course, I will do as you bid me." Then the Marquis bowed graciously as he still stood with his back to the fire, and Mr. Greenwood left the room.

Mr. Greenwood knew well that this was only the beginning of his troubles. When he made the promise he was quite sure that he would be unable to keep it. The only prospect open to him was that of breaking the promise and keeping the Marquis in ignorance of his doing so. It would be out of his power not to follow any lead in conversation which the Marchioness might give him. But it might be possible to make the Marchioness understand that her husband must be kept in the dark as to any confidence between them. For, in truth, many secrets were now discussed between them, as to which it was impossible that her ladyship should be got to hold her tongue. It had come to be received as a family doctrine between them that Lord Hampstead's removal to a better world was a thing devoutly to be wished. It is astonishing how quickly, though how gradually, ideas of such a nature will be developed when entertainment has once been given to them. The Devil makes himself at home with great rapidity when the hall door has been opened to him. A month or two back, before her ladyship went to Königsgraaf, she cer-

tainly would not have ventured to express a direct wish for the young man's death, however frequently her thoughts might have travelled in that direction. And certainly in those days, though they were yet not many weeks since, Mr. Greenwood would have been much shocked had any such suggestion been made to him as that which was now quite commonly entertained between them. The pity of it, the pity of it, the pity of it! It was thus the heart-broken mother put the matter, reconciling to herself her own wishes by that which she thought to be a duty to her own children. It was not that she and Mr. Greenwood had between them any scheme by which Lord Hampstead might cease to be in the way. Murder certainly had not come into their thoughts. But the pity of it; the pity of it! As Lord Hampstead was in all respects unfit for that high position which, if he lived, he would be called upon to fill, so was her boy, her Lord Frederic, made to adorn it by all good gifts. He was noble-looking, gracious, and aristocratic from the crown of his little head to the soles of his little feet. No more glorious heir to a title made happy the heart of any British mother,—if only he were the heir. And why should it be denied to her, a noble scion of the great House of Montessor, to be the mother of none but younger sons? The more her mind dwelt upon it, the more completely did the iniquity of her wishes fade out of sight, and her ambition appear to be no more than the natural anxiety of a mother for her child. Mr. Greenwood had no such excuses to offer to himself; but with him, too, the Devil having once made his entrance soon found himself comfortably at home. Of meditating Lord Hampstead's murder he declared to himself that he had no idea. His conscience was quite clear to him in that respect. What was it to him

who might inherit the title and the property of the Traffords? He was simply discussing with a silly woman a circumstance which no words of theirs could do aught either to cause or to prevent. It soon seemed to him to be natural that she should wish it, and natural also that he should seem to sympathize with her who was his best friend. The Marquis, he was sure, was gradually dropping him. Where was he to look for maintenance, but to his own remaining friend? The Marquis would probably give him something were he dismissed;—but that something would go but a short way towards supporting him comfortably for the rest of his life. There was a certain living in the gift of the Marquis, the Rectory of Appleslocombe in Somersetshire, which would exactly suit Mr. Greenwood's needs. The incumbent was a very old man, now known to be bed-ridden. It was 800*l.* a year. There would be ample for himself and for a curate. Mr. Greenwood had spoken to the Marquis on the subject;—but had been told, with some expression of civil regret, that he was considered to be too old for new duties. The Marchioness had talked to him frequently of Appleslocombe;—but what was the use of that? If the Marquis himself were to die, and then the Rector, there would be a chance for him,—on condition that Lord Hampstead were also out of the way. But Mr. Greenwood, as he thought of it, shook his head at the barren prospect. His sympathies no doubt were on the side of the lady. The Marquis was treating him ill. Lord Hampstead was a disgrace to his order. Lady Frances was worse even than her brother. It would be a good thing that Lord Frederic should be the heir. But all this had nothing to do with murder,—or even with meditation of murder. If the Lord should choose to take the young man it would be well; that was all.

On the same afternoon, an hour or two after he had made his promise to the Marquis, Lady Kingsbury sent for him. She always did send for him to drink tea with her at five o'clock. It was so regular that the servant would simply announce that tea was ready in her ladyship's room up-stairs. "Have you seen his lordship to-day?" she asked.

"Yes;—I have seen him."

"Since he told you in that rude way to leave the room?"

"Yes, he called me after that."

"Well?"

"He bade me not talk about Lady Frances."

"I dare say not. He does not wish to hear her name spoken. I can understand that."

"He does not wish me to mention her to you."

"Not to me? Is my mouth to be stopped? I shall say respecting her whatever I think fit. I dare say, indeed!"

"It was to my talking that he referred."

"He cannot stop people's mouths. It is all nonsense. He should have kept her at Königsgraaf, and locked her up till she had changed her mind."

"He wanted me to promise that I would not speak of her to your ladyship."

"And what did you say?" He shrugged his shoulders, and drank his tea. She shook her head and bit her lips. She would not hold her tongue, be he ever so angry. "I almost wish that she would marry the man, so that the matter might be settled. I don't suppose he would ever mention her name then himself. Has she gone back to Hendon yet?"

"I don't know, my lady."

"This is his punishment for having run counter to

his uncle's wishes and his uncle's principles. You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled." The pitch, as Mr. Greenwood very well understood, was the first Marchioness. "Did he say anything about Hampstead?"

"Not a word."

"I suppose we are not to talk about him either! Unfortunate young man! I wonder whether he feels himself how thoroughly he is destroying the family."

"I should think he must."

"Those sort of men are so selfish that they never think of any one else. It does not occur to him what Frederic might be if he were not in the way. Nothing annoys me so much as when he pretends to be fond of the children."

"I suppose he won't come any more now."

"Nothing will keep him away,—unless he were to die." Mr. Greenwood shook his head sadly. "They say he rides hard."

"I don't know." There was something in the suggestion which at the moment made the clergyman almost monosyllabic.

"Or his yacht might go down with him."

"He never yachts at this time of the year," said the clergyman, feeling comfort in the security thus assured.

"I suppose not. Bad weeds never get cut off. But yet it is astonishing how many elder sons have been—taken away, during the last quarter of a century."

"A great many."

"There never could have been one who could be better spared," said the stepmother.

"Yes;—he might be spared."

"If you only think of the advantage to the family! It will be ruined if he comes to the title. And my Fred would be such an honour to the name! There is no—"

thing to be done, of course." That was the first word that had ever been spoken in that direction, and that word was allowed to pass without any reply having been made to it, though it had been uttered almost in a question.

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY AMALDINA'S LOVER.

TRAFFORD PARK was in Shropshire. Llwdydlw, the Welsh seat of the Duke of Merioneth, was in the next county;—one of the seats that is, for the Duke had mansions in many counties. Here at this period of the year it suited Lord Llwdydlw to live,—not for any special gratification of his own, but because North Wales was supposed to require his presence. He looked to the Quarter Sessions, to the Roads, to the Lunatic Asylum, and to the Conservative Interests generally of that part of Great Britain. That he should spend Christmas at Llwdydlw was a thing of course. In January he went into Durham; February to Somersetshire. In this way he parcelled himself out about the kingdom, remaining in London of course from the first to the last of the Parliamentary Session. It was, we may say emphatically, a most useful life, but in which there was no recreation and very little excitement. It was not wonderful that he should be unable to find time to get married. As he could not get as far as Castle Hautboy,—partly, perhaps, because he did not especially like the omnium-gatherum mode of living which prevailed there,—it had been arranged that he should give up two days early in December to meet the lady of his love under her aunt's roof at Trafford Park. Lady Amaldina and he were both to arrive there on Wednesday, December 3rd, and

remain till the Tuesday morning. There had not been any special term arranged as to the young lady's visit, as her time was not of much consequence; but it had been explained minutely that the lover must reach Denbigh by the 5.45 train, so as to be able to visit certain institutions in the town before a public dinner which was to be held in the Conservative interest at seven. Lord Llwdythlw had comfort in thinking that he could utilize his two days' idleness at Trafford in composing and studying the speech on the present state of affairs, which, though to be uttered at Denbigh, would, no doubt, appear in all the London newspapers on the following morning.

As it was to be altogether a lover's meeting, no company was to be invited. Mr. Greenwood would, of course, be there. To make up something of a dinner-party, the Mayor of Shrewsbury was asked for the first evening, with his wife. The Mayor was a strong conservative politician, and Lord Llwdythlw would therefore be glad to meet him. For the next day's dinner the clergyman of the parish, with his wife and daughter, were secured. The chief drawback to these festive arrangements consisted in the fact that both Lady Amaldina and her lover arrived on the day of the bitter quarrel between the Marquis and his wife.

Perhaps, however, the coming of guests is the best relief which can be afforded for the misery of such domestic feuds. After such words as had been spoken Lord and Lady Trafford could hardly have sat down comfortably to dinner, with no one between them but Mr. Greenwood. In such case there could not have been much conversation. But now the Marquis could come bustling into the drawing-room to welcome his wife's niece before dinner without any reference to the

discomforts of the morning. Almost at the same moment Lord Llwdytlw made his appearance, having arrived at the latest possible moment, and having dressed himself in ten minutes. As there was no one present but the family, Lady Amaldina kissed her future husband,—as she might have kissed her grandfather,—and his lordship received the salutation as any stern, undemonstrative grandfather might have done. Then Mr. Greenwood entered, with the Mayor and his wife, and the party was complete. The Marquis took Lady Amaldina out to dinner and her lover sat next to her. The Mayor and his wife were on the other side of the table, and Mr. Greenwood was between them. The soup had not been handed round before Lord Llwdytlw was deep in a question as to the comparative merits of the Shropshire and Welsh Lunatic asylums. From that moment till the time at which the gentlemen went to the ladies in the drawing-room the conversation was altogether of a practical nature. As soon as the ladies had left the table roads and asylums gave way to general politics,—as to which the Marquis and Mr. Greenwood allowed the Conservatives to have pretty much their own way. In the drawing-room conversation became rather heavy, till, at a few minutes after ten, the Mayor, observing that he had a drive before him, retired for the night. The Marchioness with Lady Amaldina followed quickly; and within five minutes the Welsh lord, having muttered something as to the writing of letters, was within the seclusion of his own bedroom. Not a word of love had been spoken, but Lady Amaldina was satisfied. On her toilet-table she found a little parcel addressed to her by his lordship containing a locket with her monogram, "A. L.," in diamonds. The hour of midnight was long passed before his lordship

had reduced to words the first half of those promises of constitutional safety which he intended to make to the Conservatives of Denbigh. Not much was seen of Lord Llwdythlw after breakfast on the following morning, so determined was he to do justice to the noble cause which he had in hand. After lunch a little expedition was arranged for the two lovers, and the busy politician allowed himself to be sent out for a short drive with no other companion than his future bride. Had he been quite intimate with her he would have given her the manuscript of his speech, and occupied himself by saying it to her as a lesson which he had learnt. As he could not do this he recapitulated to her all his engagements, as though excusing his own slowness as to matrimony, and declared that what with the property and what with Parliament, he never knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels. But when he paused he had done nothing towards naming a certain day, so that Lady Amaldina found herself obliged to take the matter into her own hands. "When then do you think it will be?" she asked. He put his hand up and rubbed his head under his hat as though the subject were very distressing to him. "I would not for worlds, you know, think that I was in your way," she said, with just a tone of reproach in her voice.

He was in truth sincerely attached to her;—much more so than it was in the compass of her nature to be to him. If he could have had her for his wife without any trouble of bridal preparations, or of subsequent honeymooning, he would most willingly have begun from this moment. It was incumbent on him to be married, and he had quite made up his mind that this was the sort of wife that he required. But now he was sadly put about by that tone of reproach. "I wish to good-

ness," he said, "that I had been born a younger brother, or just anybody else than I am."

"Why on earth should you wish that?"

"Because I am so bothered. Of course, you don't understand it."

"I do understand," said Amaldina;—"but there must, you know, be some end to all that. I suppose the Parliament and the Lunatic Asylums will go on just the same always."

"No doubt,—no doubt."

"If so, there is no reason why any day should ever be fixed. People are beginning to think that it must be off, because it has been talked of so long."

"I hope it will never be off."

"I know the Prince said the other day that he had expected——. But it does not signify what he expected." Lord Llwdytlw had also heard the story of what the Prince had said that he expected, and he scratched his head again with vexation. It had been reported that the Prince had declared that he had hoped to be asked to be godfather long ago. Lady Amaldina had probably heard some other version of the story. "What I mean is that everybody was surprised that it should be so long postponed, but that they now begin to think it is abandoned altogether."

"Shall we say June next?" said the ecstatic lover. Lady Amaldina thought that June would do very well. "But there will be the Town's Education Improvement Bill," said his lordship, again scratching his head.

"I thought all the towns had been educated long ago." He looked at her with feelings of a double sorrow;—sorrow that she should have known so little, sorrow that she should be treated so badly. "I think we will put it off altogether," she said angrily.

"No, no, no," he exclaimed. "Would August do? I certainly have promised to be at Inverness to open the New Docks."

"That's nonsense," she said. "What can the Docks want with you to open them?"

"My father, you know," he said, "has a very great interest in the city. I think I'll get David to do it." Lord David was his brother, also a Member of Parliament, and a busy man, as were all the Powell family; but one who liked a little recreation among the moors when the fatigue of the House of Commons were over.

"Of course he could do it," said Lady Amaldina. "He got himself married ten years ago."

"I'll ask him, but he'll be very angry. He always says that he oughtn't to be made to do an elder brother's work."

"Then I may tell mamma?" His lordship again rubbed his head, but did it this time in a manner that was conceived to signify assent. The lady pressed his arm gently, and the visit to Trafford, as far as she was concerned, was supposed to have been a success. She gave him another little squeeze as they got out of the carriage, and he went away sadly to learn the rest of his speech, thinking how sweet it might be "To do as others use; Play with the tangles of Neæra's hair, Or sport with Amaryllis in the shade."

But there was a worse interruption for Lord Llwdytlw than this which he had now undergone. At about five, when he was making the peroration of his speech quite secure in his memory, a message came to him from the Marchioness, saying that she would be much obliged to him if he would give her five minutes in her own room. Perhaps he would be kind enough to drink a cup of

tea with her. This message was brought by her ladyship's own maid, and could be regarded only as a command. But Lord Llwdythlw wanted no tea, cared not at all for Lady Kingsbury, and was very anxious as to his speech. He almost cursed the fidgety fretfulness of women as he slipped the manuscript into his letter-case, and followed the girl along the passages.

"This is so kind of you," she said. He gave himself the usual rub of vexation as he bowed his head, but said nothing. She saw the state of his mind, but was determined to persevere. Though he was a man plain to look at, he was known to be the very pillar and support of his order. No man in England was so wedded to the Conservative cause,—to that cause which depends for its success on the maintenance of those social institutions by which Great Britain has become the first among the nations. No one believed as did Lord Llwdythlw in keeping the different classes in their own places,—each place requiring honour, truth, and industry. The Marchioness understood something of his character in that respect. Who therefore would be so ready to see the bitterness of her own injuries, to sympathize with her as to the unfitness of that son and daughter who had no blood relationship to herself, to perceive how infinitely better it would be for the "order" that her own little Lord Frederic should be allowed to succeed and to assist in keeping the institutions of Great Britain in their proper position? She had become absolutely dead to the fact that by any allusion to the probability of such a succession she was expressing a wish for the untimely death of one for whose welfare she was bound to be solicitous. She had lost, by constant dwelling on the subject, her power of seeing how the idea would strike the feelings of another person.

Here was a man peculiarly blessed in the world, a man at the very top of his "order," one who would be closely connected with herself, and on whom at some future time she might be able to lean as on a strong staff. Therefore she determined to trust her sorrows into his ears.

"Won't you have a cup of tea?"

"I never take any at this time of the day."

"Perhaps a cup of coffee?"

"Nothing before dinner, thank you."

"You were not at Castle Hautboy when Hampstead and his sister were there?"

"I have not been at Castle Hautboy since the spring."

"Did you not think it very odd that they should have been asked?"

"No, indeed! Why odd?"

"You know the story;—do you not? As one about to be so nearly connected with the family, you ought to know it. Lady Frances has made a most unfortunate engagement, to a young man altogether beneath her,—to a Post Office clerk!"

"I did hear something of that."

"She behaved shockingly here, and was then taken away by her brother. I have been forced to divorce myself from her altogether." Lord Llwdytlw rubbed his head; but on this occasion Lady Kingsbury misinterpreted the cause of his vexation. He was troubled at being made to listen to this story. She conceived that he was disgusted by the wickedness of Lady Frances. "After that I think my sister was very wrong to have her at Castle Hautboy. No countenance ought to be shown to a young woman who can behave so abominably." He could only rub his head. "Do you not think that such marriages are most injurious to the best interests of society?"

"I certainly think that young ladies should marry in their own rank."

"So much depends upon it,—does it not, Lord Llwdythlw? All the future blood of our head families! My own opinion is that nothing could be too severe for such conduct."

"Will severity prevent it?"

"Nothing else can. My own impression is that a father in such case should be allowed to confine his daughter. But then the Marquis is so weak."

"The country would not stand it for a moment."

"So much the worse for the country," said her ladyship, holding up her hands. "But the brother is if possible worse than the sister."

"Hampstead?"

"He utterly hates all idea of an aristocracy."

"That is absurd."

"Most absurd," said the Marchioness, feeling herself to be encouraged;—"most absurd, and abominable, and wicked. He is quite a revolutionist."

"Not that, I think," said his lordship, who knew pretty well the nature of Hampstead's political feelings.

"Indeed he is. Why, he encourages his sister! He would not mind her marrying a shoeblick if only he could debase his own family. Think what I must feel, I, with my darling boys!"

"Is not he kind to them?"

"I would prefer that he should never see them!"

"I don't see that at all," said the angry lord.

But she altogether misunderstood him. "When I think of what he is, and to what he will reduce the whole family should he live, I cannot bear to see him touch them. Think of the blood of the Traffords, of the blood of the Mountressors, of the blood of the Haute-

viles;—think of your own blood, which is now to be connected with theirs, and that all this is to be defiled because this man chooses to bring about a disreputable, disgusting marriage with the expressed purpose of degrading us all.”

“I beg your pardon, Lady Kingsbury; I shall be in no way degraded.”

“Think of us; think of my children.”

“Nor will they. It may be a misfortune, but will be no degradation. Honour can only be impaired by that which is dishonourable. I wish that Lady Frances had given her heart elsewhere, but I feel sure that the name of her family is safe in her hands. As for Hampstead, he is a young man for whose convictions I have no sympathy,—but I am sure that he is a gentleman.”

“I would that he were dead,” said Lady Kingsbury in her wrath.

“Lady Kingsbury!”

“I would that he were dead!”

“I can only say,” said Lord Llwdytlw, rising from his chair, “that you have made your confidence most unfortunately. Lord Hampstead is a young nobleman whom I should be proud to call my friend. A man’s politics are his own. His honour, his integrity, and even his conduct belong in a measure to his family. I do not think that his father, or his brothers, or, if I may say so, his stepmother, will ever have occasion to blush for anything that he may do.” With this he bowed to the Marchioness, and stalked out of the room with a grand manner, which those who saw him shuffling his feet in the House of Commons would hardly have thought belonged to him.

The dinner on that day was very quiet, and Lady

Kingsbury retired to bed earlier even than usual. The conversation at the dinner was dull, and turned mostly on Church subjects. Mr. Greenwood endeavoured to be sprightly, and the parson, and the parson's wife, and the parson's daughter were uncomfortable. Lord Llwdyithlw was almost dumb. Lady Amaldina, having settled the one matter of interest to her, was simply contented. On the next morning her lover took his departure by an earlier train than he had intended. It was, he said, necessary that he should look into some matters at Denbigh before he made his speech. He contrived to get a compartment to himself, and there he practised his lesson till he felt that further practice would only confuse him.

"You had Fanny at the Castle the other day," Lady Kingsbury said the next morning to her niece.

"Mamma thought it would be good-natured to ask them both."

"They did not deserve it. Their conduct has been such that I am forced to say that they deserve nothing from my family. Did she speak about this marriage of hers?"

"She did mention it."

"Well!"

"Oh, there was nothing. Of course there was much more to say about mine. She was saying that she would be glad to be a bridesmaid."

"Pray don't have her."

"Why not, aunt?"

"I could not possibly be there if you did. I have been compelled to divorce her from my heart."

"Poor Fanny!"

"But she was not ashamed of what she is doing?"

"I should say not. She is not one of those that are ever ashamed."

"No, no. Nothing would make her ashamed. All ideas of propriety she has banished from her,—as though they didn't exist. I expect to hear that she disregards marriage altogether."

"Aunt Clara!"

"What can you expect from doctrines such as those which she and her brother share? Thank God, you have never been in the way of hearing of such things. It breaks my heart when I think of what my own darlings will be sure to hear some of these days,—should their half-brother and half-sister still be left alive. But, Amaldina, pray do not have her for one of your bridesmaids." Lady Amaldina, remembering that her cousin was very handsome, and also that there might be a difficulty in making up the twenty titled virgins, gave her aunt no promise.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SCHEME IS SUCCESSFUL.

WHEN the matter was mentioned to George Roden by his mother he could see no reason why she should not dine at Hendon Hall. He himself was glad to have an opportunity of getting over that roughness of feeling which had certainly existed between him and his friend when they parted with each other on the road. As to his mother, it would be well that she should so far return to the usages of the world as to dine at the house of her son's friend. "It is only going back to what you used to be," he said.

"You know nothing of what I used to be," she replied, almost angrily.

"I ask no questions, and have endeavoured so to train myself that I should care but little about it. But I knew

it was so." Then after a pause he went back to the current of his thoughts. "Had my father been a prince I think that I should take no pride in it."

"It is well to have been born a gentleman," she said.

"It is well to be a gentleman, and if the good things which are generally attendant on high birth will help a man in reaching noble feelings and grand resolves, so it may be that to have been well born will be an assistance. But if a man derogates from his birth,—as so many do,—then it is a crime."

"All that has to be taken for granted, George."

"But it is not taken for granted. Though the man himself be knave, and fool, and coward, he is supposed to be ennobled because the blood of the Howards run in his veins. And worse again: though he has gifts of nobility beyond compare he can hardly dare to stand upright before lords and dukes because of his inferiority."

"That is all going away."

"Would that it could be made to go a little faster. It may be helped in its going. It may be that in these days the progress shall be accelerated. But you will let me write to Hampstead and say that you will come." She assented, and so that part of the little dinner-party was arranged.

After that she herself contrived to see the Quaker one evening on his return home. "Yes," said Mr. Fay; "I have heard thy proposition from Marion. Why should the young lord desire such a one as I am to sit at his table?"

"He is George's intimate friend."

"That thy son should choose his friend well, I surely believe, because I see him to be a prudent and wise young man, who does not devote himself overmuch

to riotous amusements." George did occasionally go to a theatre, thereby offending the Quaker's judgment, justifying the "overmuch," and losing his claim to a full measure of praise. "Therefore I will not quarrel with him that he has chosen his friend from among the great ones of the earth. But like to like is a good motto. I fancy that the weary draught-horse, such as I am, should not stable himself with hunters and racers."

"This young man affects the society of such as yourself and George, rather than that of others nobly born as himself."

"I do not know that he shows his wisdom the more."

"You should give him credit at any rate for good endeavours."

"It is not for me to judge him one way or the other. Did he ask that Marion should also go to his house?"

"Certainly. Why should not the child see something of the world that may amuse her?"

"Little good can come to my Marion from such amusements, Mrs. Roden; but something, perhaps, of harm. Wilt thou say that such recreation must necessarily be of service to a girl born to perform the hard duties of a strict life?"

"I would trust Marion in anything," said Mrs. Roden, eagerly.

"So would I; so would I. She hath ever been a good girl."

"But do you not distrust her if you shut her up, and are afraid to allow her even to sit at table in a strange house?"

"I have never forbidden her to sit at thy table," said the Quaker.

"And you should let her go specially as a kindness

to me. For my son's sake I have promised to be there, and it would be a comfort to me to have another woman with me."

"Then you will hardly need me," said Mr. Fay, not without a touch of jealousy.

"He specially pressed his request that you would come. It is among such as you that he would wish to make himself known. Moreover, if Marion is to be there, you, I am sure, will choose to accompany her. Would you not wish to see how the child bears herself on such an occasion?"

"On all occasions, at all places, at all hours, I would wish to have my child with me. There is nothing else left to me in all the world on which my eye can rest with pleasure. But I doubt whether it may be for her good." Then he took his departure, leaving the matter still undecided, speaking of it with words which seemed to imply that he must ultimately refuse, but impressing Mrs. Roden with a conviction that he would at last accept the invitation.

"Doest thou wish it thyself?" he said to his daughter before retiring to rest that night.

"If you will go, father, I should like it."

"Why shouldst thou like it? What doest thou expect? Is it because the young man is a lord, and that there will be something of the gilded grandeur of the grand ones of the earth to be seen about his house and his table?"

"It is not for that, father."

"Or is it because he is young and comely, and can say soft things as such youths are wont to say, because he will smell sweetly of scents and lavender, because his hand will be soft to the touch, with rings on his fingers, and jewels perhaps on his bosom like a woman?"

"No, father; it is not for that."

"The delicacies which he will give thee to eat and to drink; the sweetmeats and rich food cannot be much to one nurtured as thou hast been."

"Certainly not, father; they can be nothing to me."

"Then why is it that thou wouldst go to his house?"

"It is that I may hear you, father, speak among men."

"Nay," said he, laughing, "thou mayst hear me better speak among men at King's Court in the City. There I can hold my own well enough, but with these young men over their wine, I shall have but little to say, I fancy. If thou hast nothing to gain but to hear thy old father talk, the time and money will be surely thrown away."

"I would hear him talk, father."

"The young lord?"

"Yes; the young lord. He is bright and clever, and, coming from another world than our world, can tell me things that I do not know."

"Can he tell thee aught that is good?"

"From what I hear of him from our friend he will tell me, I think, naught that is bad. You will be there to hear, and to arrest his words if they be evil. But I think him to be one from whose mouth no guile or folly will be heard."

"Who art thou, my child, that thou shouldst be able to judge whether words of guile are likely to come from a young man's lips?" But this he said smiling and pressing her hand while he seemed to rebuke her.

"Nay, father; I do not judge. I only say that I think it might be so. They are not surely all false and wicked. But if you wish it otherwise I will not utter another syllable to urge the request."

“We will go, Marion. Thy friend urged that it is not good that thou shouldst always be shut up with me alone. And, though I may distrust the young lord as not knowing him, my confidence in thee is such that I think that nothing will ever shake it.” And so it was settled that they should all go. He would send to a livery stable and hire a carriage for this unusual occasion. There should be no need for the young lord to send them home. Though he did not know, as he said, much of the ways of the outside world, it was hardly the custom for the host to supply carriages as well as viands. When he dined, as he did annually, with the elder Mr. Pogson, Mr. Pogson sent him home in no carriage. He would sit at the lord’s table, but he would go and come as did other men.

On the Friday named the two ladies and the two men arrived at Hendon Hall in something more than good time. Hampstead hopped and skipped about as though he were delighted as a boy might have been at their coming. It may be possible that there was something of guile even in this, and that he had calculated that he might thus best create quickly that intimacy with the Quaker and his daughter which he felt to be necessary for his full enjoyment of the evening. If the Quaker himself expected much of that gilding of which he had spoken he was certainly disappointed. The garniture of Hendon Hall had always been simple, and now had assumed less even of aristocratic finery than it used to show when prepared for the use of the Marchioness. “I’m glad you’ve come in time,” said he, “because you can get comfortably warm before dinner.” Then he fluttered about round Mrs. Roden, paying her attention much rather than Marion Fay,—still with some guile, as knowing that he might thus best prepare

for the coming of future good things. "I suppose you found it awfully cold," he said.

"I do not know that we were awed, my lord," said the Quaker. "But the winter has certainly set in with some severity."

"Oh, father!" said Marion, rebuking him.

"Everything is awful now," said Hampstead, laughing. "Of course the word is absurd, but one gets in the way of using it because other people do."

"Nay, my lord, I crave pardon if I seemed to criticize thy language. Being somewhat used to a sterner manner of speaking, I took the word in its stricter sense."

"It is but slang from a girl's school, after all," said Roden.

"Now, Master George, I am not going to bear correction from you," said Hampstead, "though I put up with it from your elders. Miss Fay, when you were at school did they talk slang?"

"Where I was at school, Lord Hampstead," Marion answered, "we were kept in strict leading-strings. Fancy, father, what Miss Watson would have said if we had used any word in a sense not used in a dictionary."

"Miss Watson was a sensible woman, my dear, and understood well, and performed faithfully, the duties which she had undertaken. I do not know that as much can be said of all those who keep fashionable seminaries for young ladies at the West End."

"Miss Watson had a red face, and a big cap, and spectacles;—had she not?" said Hampstead, appealing to Marion Fay.

"Miss Watson," said Mrs. Roden, "whom I remember to have seen once when Marion was at school with her, was a very little woman, with bright eyes, who wore her

own hair, and always looked as though she had come out of a bandbox."

"She was absolutely true to her ideas of life, as a Quaker should be," said Mr. Fay, "and I only hope that Marion will follow her example. As to language, it is, I think, convenient that to a certain extent our mode of speech should consort with our mode of living. You would not expect to hear from a pulpit the phrases which belong to a racecourse, nor would the expressions which are decorous, perhaps, in aristocratic drawing-rooms besit the humble parlours of clerks and artisans."

"I never will say that anything is awful again," said Lord Hampstead, as he gave his arm to Mrs. Roden, and took her in to dinner.

"I hope he will not be angry with father," whispered Marion Fay to George Roden, as they walked across the hall together.

"Not in the least. Nothing of that kind could anger him. If your father were to cringe or to flatter him then he would be disgusted."

"Father would never do that," said Marion, with confidence.

The dinner went off very pleasantly, Hampstead and Roden taking between them the weight of the conversation. The Quaker was perhaps a little frightened by the asperity of his own first remark, and ate his good things almost in silence. Marion was quite contented to listen, as she had told her father was her purpose; but it was perhaps to the young lord's words that she gave attention rather than to those of his friends'. His voice was pleasant to her ears. There was a certain graciousness in his words, as to which she did not suppose that their softness was specially intended for her hearing. Who does not know the way in which a

man may set himself at work to gain admission into a woman's heart without addressing hardly a word to herself? And who has not noted the sympathy with which the woman has unconsciously accepted the homage? That pressing of the hand, that squeezing of the arm, that glancing of the eyes, which are common among lovers, are generally the developed consequences of former indications which have had their full effect, even though they were hardly understood, and could not have been acknowledged, at the time. But Marion did, perhaps, feel that there was something of worship even in the way in which her host looked towards her with rapid glances from minute to minute, as though to see that if not with words, at any rate with thoughts, she was taking her share in the conversation which was certainly intended for her delight. The Quaker in the mean time ate his dinner very silently. He was conscious of having shown himself somewhat of a prig about that slang phrase, and was repenting himself. Mrs. Roden every now and then would put in a word in answer rather to her son than to the host, but she was aware of those electric sparks which, from Lord Hampstead's end of the wire, were being directed every moment against Marion Fay's heart.

"Now just for the fashion of the thing you must sit here for a quarter of an hour, while we are supposed to be drinking our wine." This was said by Lord Hampstead when he took the two ladies into the drawing-room after dinner.

"Don't hurry yourselves," said Mrs. Roden. "Marion and I are old friends, and will get on very well."

"Oh yes," said Marion. "It will be pleasure enough to me just to sit here and look around me." Then Hampstead knelt down between them, pretending to

doctor up the fire, which certainly required no doctoring. They were standing one on one side and the other on the other, looking down upon him.

"You are spoiling that fire, Lord Hampstead," said Mrs. Roden.

"Coals were made to be poked. I feel sure of that. Do take the poker and give them one blow. That will make you at home in the house for ever, you know." Then he handed the implement to Marion. She could hardly do other than take it in her hand. She took it, blushed up to the roots of her hair, paused a moment, and then gave the one blow to the coals that had been required of her. "Thanks," said he, nodding at her as he still knelt at her feet and took the poker from her; "thanks. Now you are free of Hendon Hall for ever. I wouldn't have any one but a friend poke my fire." Upon that he got up and walked slowly out of the room.

"Oh, Mrs. Roden," said Marion, "I wish I hadn't done it."

"It doesn't matter. It was only a joke."

"Of course it was a joke! but I wish I hadn't done it. It seemed at the moment that I should look to be cross if I didn't do as he bade me. But when he had said that about being at home——! Oh, Mrs. Roden, I wish I had not done it."

"He will know that it was nothing, my dear. He is good-humoured and playful, and likes the feeling of making us feel that we are not strangers." But Marion knew that Lord Hampstead would not take it as meaning nothing. Though she could see no more than his back as he walked out of the room, she knew that he was glowing with triumph.

"Now, Mr. Fay, here is port if you like, but I recommend you to stick to the claret."

"I have pretty well done all the sticking, my lord, of which I am competent," said the Quaker. "A little wine goes a long way with me, as I am not much used to it."

"Wine maketh glad the heart of man," said Roden.

"True enough, Mr. Roden. But I doubt whether it be good that a man's heart should be much gladdened. Gladness and sorrow counterbalance each other too surely. An even serenity is best fitted to human life, if it can be reached."

"A level road without hills," said Hampstead. "They say that horses are soonest tired by such travelling."

"They would hardly tell you so themselves if they could give their experience after a long day's journey." Then there was a pause, but Mr. Fay continued to speak. "My lord, I fear I misbehaved myself in reference to that word 'awful' which fell by chance from thy mouth."

"Oh, dear no; nothing of the kind."

"I was bethinking me that I was among the young men in our court in Great Broad Street, who will indulge sometimes in a manner of language not befitting their occupation at the time, or perhaps their station in life. I am wont then to remind them that words during business hours should be used in their strict sense. But, my lord, if you will take a farm horse from his plough you cannot expect from him that he should prance upon the green."

"It is because I think that there should be more mixing between what you call plough horses and animals used simply for play, that I have been so proud to make you welcome here. I hope it may not be by many the last time that you will act as a living dictionary for me. If you won't have any more wine we will go to them in the drawing-room."

Mrs. Roden very soon declared it necessary that they should start back to Holloway. Hampstead himself did not attempt to delay them. The words that had absolutely passed between him and Marion had hardly been more than those which have been here set down, but yet he felt that he had accomplished not only with satisfaction but with some glory to himself the purpose for which he had specially invited his guests. His scheme had been carried out with perfect success. After the manner in which Marion had obeyed his behest about the fire, he was sure that he was justified in regarding her as a friend.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT THEY ALL THOUGHT AS THEY WENT HOME.

LORD HAMPSTEAD had come to the door to help them into the carriage. "Lord Hampstead," said Mrs. Roden, "you will catch your death of cold. It is freezing, and you have nothing on your head."

"I am quite indifferent about those things," he said, as for a moment he held Marion's hand while he helped her into the carriage.

"Do go in," she whispered. Her lips as she spoke were close to his ear,—but that simply came from the position in which chance had placed her. Her hand was still in his,—but that, too, was the accident of the situation. But there is, I think, an involuntary tendency among women to make more than necessary use of assistance when the person tendering it has made himself really welcome. Marion had certainly no such intention. Had the idea come to her at the moment she would have shrank from his touch. It was only when his fingers were withdrawn, when the

feeling of the warmth of this proximity had passed away, that she became aware that he had been so close to her, and that now they were separated.

Then her father entered the carriage, and Roden.

“Good-night, my lord,” said the Quaker. “I have passed my evening very pleasantly. I doubt whether I may not feel the less disposed for my day’s work to-morrow.”

“Not at all, Mr. Fay; not at all. You will be like a giant refreshed. There is nothing like a little friendly conversation for bracing up the mind. I hope it will not be long before you come and try it again.” Then the carriage was driven off, and Lord Hampstead went in to warm himself before the fire which Marion Fay had poked.

He had not intended to fall in love with her. Was there ever a young man who, when he first found a girl to be pleasant to him, has intended to fall in love with her? Girls will intend to fall in love, or, more frequently perhaps, to avoid it; but men in such matters rarely have a purpose. Lord Hampstead had found her, as he thought, to be an admirable specimen of excellence in that class of mankind which his convictions and theories induced him to extol. He thought that good could be done by mixing the racers and plough-horses,—and as regarded the present experiment, Marion Fay was a plough-horse. No doubt he would not have made this special attempt had she not pleased his eye, and his ear, and his senses generally. He certainly was not a philosopher to whom in his search after wisdom an old man such as Zachary Fay could make himself as acceptable as his daughter. It may be acknowledged of him that he was susceptible to female influences. But it had not at first occurred to him that

it would be a good thing to fall in love with Marion Fay. Why should he not be on friendly terms with an excellent and lovely girl without loving her? Such had been his ideas after first meeting Marion at Mrs. Roden's house. Then he had determined that friends could not become friends without seeing each other, and he had concocted his scheme without being aware of the feelings which she had excited. The scheme had been carried out; he had had his dinner-party; Marion Fay had poked his fire; there had been one little pressure of the hand as he helped her into the carriage, one little whispered word, which had it not been whispered would have been as nothing; one moment of consciousness that his lips were close to her cheek; and then he returned to the warmth of his fire, quite conscious that he was in love.

What was to come of it? When he had argued both with his sister and with Roden that their marriage would be unsuitable because of their difference in social position, and had justified his opinion by declaring it to be impossible that any two persons could, by their own doing, break through the conventions of the world without ultimate damage to themselves and to others, he had silently acknowledged to himself that he also was bound by the law which he was teaching. That such conventions should gradually cease to be, would be good; but no man is strong enough to make a new law for his own governing at the spur of the moment;—and certainly no woman. The existing distances between man and man were radically bad. This was the very gist of his doctrine; but the instant abolition of such distances had been proved by many experiments to be a vain dream, and the diminution of them must be gradual and slow. That such diminution would go on

till the distances should ultimately disappear in some future millennium was to him a certainty. The distances were being diminished by the increasing wisdom and philanthropy of mankind. To him, born to high rank and great wealth, it had been given to do more perhaps than another. In surrendering there is more efficacy, as there is also more grace, than in seizing. What of his grandeur he might surrender without injury to others to whom he was bound, he would surrender. Of what exact nature or kind should be the woman whom it might please him to select as his wife, he had formed no accurate idea; but he would endeavour so to marry that he would make no step down in the world that might be offensive to his family, but would yet satisfy his own convictions by drawing himself somewhat away from aristocratic blood. His father had done the same when choosing his first wife, and the happiness of his choice would have been perfect had not death interfered. Actuated by such reasoning as this, he had endeavoured in a mild way to separate his sister from her lover, thinking that they who were in love should be bound by the arguments which seemed good to him who was not in love. But now he also was in love, and the arguments as they applied to himself fell into shreds and tatters as he sat gazing at his fire, holding the poker in his hand.

Had there ever been anything more graceful than the mock violence with which she had pretended to strike heartily at the coals?—had there ever anything been more lovely than that mingled glance of doubt, of fear, and of friendliness with which she had looked into his face as she did it? She had quite understood his feeling when he made his little request. There had been heart enough in her, spirit enough, intelligence

enough, to tell her at once the purport of his demand. Or rather she had not seen it all at once, but had only understood when her hand had gone too far to be withdrawn that something of love as well as friendship had been intended. Before long she should know how much of love had been intended! Whether his purpose was or was not compatible with the wisdom of his theory as to a gradual diminution of distances, his heart had gone too far now for any retracting. As he sat there he at once began to teach himself that the arguments he had used were only good in reference to high-born females, and that they need not necessarily affect himself. Whomever he might marry he would raise to his own rank. For his rank he did not care a straw himself. It was of the prejudices of others he was thinking when he assured himself that Marion would make as good a Countess and as good a Marchioness as any lady in the land. In regard to his sister it was otherwise. She must follow the rank of her husband. It might be that the sores which she would cause to many by becoming the wife of a Post Office clerk ought to be avoided. But there 'need be no sores in regard to his marriage with Marion Fay.

His present reasoning was, no doubt, bad, but such as it was it was allowed to prevail absolutely. It did not even occur to him that he would make an attempt to enfranchise himself from Marion's charms. Whatever might occur, whatever details there might be which would require his attention in regard to his father or others of the family, everything must give way to his present passion. She had poked his fire, and she must be made to sit at his hearth for the remainder of their joint existence. She must be made to sit there if he could so plead his cause that his love should prevail

with her. As to the Quaker father, he thought altogether well of him too,—an industrious, useful, intelligent man, of whose quaint manners and manly bearing he would not be ashamed in any society. She, too, was a Quaker, but that to him was little or nothing. He also had his religious convictions, but they were not of a nature to be affronted or shocked by those of any one who believed that the increasing civilization of the world had come from Christ's teaching. The simple, earnest purity of the girl's faith would be an attraction to him rather than otherwise. Indeed, there was nothing in his Marion, as he saw her, that was not conducive to feminine excellence.

His Marion! How many words had he spoken to her? How many thoughts had he extracted from her? How many of her daily doings had he ever witnessed? But what did it matter? It is not the girl that the man loves, but the image which imagination has built up for him to fill the outside covering which has pleased his senses. He was quite as sure that the Ten Commandments were as safe in Marion's hands as though she were already a saint, canonized for the perfection of all virtues. He was quite ready to take that for granted; and having so convinced himself, was now only anxious as to the means by which he might make this priceless pearl his own.

There must be some other scheme. He sat, thinking of this, cudgelling his brains for some contrivance by which he and Marion Fay might be brought together again with the least possible delay. His idea of a dinner-party had succeeded beyond all hope. But he could not have another dinner-party next week. Nor could he bring together the guests whom he had to-day entertained after his sister's return. He was bound not

to admit George Roden to his house as long as she should be with him. Without George he could hardly hope that Mrs. Roden would come to him, and without Mrs. Roden how could he entice the Quaker and his daughter? His sister would be with him on the following day, and would, no doubt, be willing to assist him with Marion if it were possible. But the giving of such assistance on her part would tacitly demand assistance also from him in her difficulties. Such assistance, he knew, he could not give, having pledged himself to his father in regard to George Roden. He could at the present moment devise no other scheme than the very simple one of going to Mrs. Roden, and declaring his love for the girl.

* * * * *

The four guests in the carriage were silent throughout their drive home. They all had thoughts of their own sufficient to occupy them. George Roden told himself that this, for a long day, must be his last visit to Hendon Hall. He knew that Lady Frances would arrive on the morrow, and that then his presence was forbidden. He had refused to make any promise as to his assured absence, not caring to subject himself to an absolute bond; but he was quite aware that he was bound in honour not to enter the house in which he could not be made welcome. He felt himself to be safe, with a great security. The girl whom he loved would certainly be true. He was not impatient, as was Hampstead. He did not trouble his mind with schemes which were to be brought to bear within the next few days. He could bide his time, comforting himself with his faith. But still a lover can hardly be satisfied with the world unless he can see some point in his heaven from which light may be expected to break through the

clouds. He could not see the point from which the light might be expected.

The Quaker was asking himself many questions. Had he done well to take his girl to this young nobleman's house? Had he done well to take himself there? It had been as it were a sudden disruption in the settled purposes of his life. What had he or his girl to do with lords? And yet he had been pleased. Courtesy always flatters, and flattery is always pleasant. A certain sense of softness had been grateful to him. There came upon him a painful question,—as there does on so many of us, when for a time we make a successful struggle against the world's allurements,—whether in abandoning the delights of life we do in truth get any compensation for them. Would it not after all be better to do as others use? Phœbus as he touches our trembling ear encourages us but with a faint voice. It had been very pleasant,—the soft chairs, the quiet attendance, the well-cooked dinner, the good wines, the bright glasses, the white linen,—and pleasanter than all that silvery tone of conversation to which he was so little accustomed either in King's Court or Paradise Row. Marion indeed was always gentle to him as a dove cooing; but he was aware of himself that he was not gentle in return. Stern truth, expressed shortly in strong language, was the staple of his conversation at home. He had declared to himself all through his life that stern truth and strong language were better for mankind than soft phrases. But in his own parlour in Paradise Row he had rarely seen his Marion bright as she had been at this lord's table. Was it good for his Marion that she should be encouraged to such brightness; and if so, had he been cruel to her to suffuse her entire life with a colour so dark as to admit of no light? Why had her beauty

shone so brightly in the lord's presence? He too knew something of love, and had it always present to his mind that the time would come when his Marion's heart would be given to some stranger. He did not think, he would not think, that the stranger had now come;—but would it be well that his girl's future should be affected even as was his own? He argued the points much within himself, and told himself that it could not be well.

Mrs. Roden had read it nearly all,—though she could not quite read the simple honesty of the young lord's purpose. The symptoms of love had been plain enough to her eyes, and she had soon told herself that she had done wrong in taking the girl to the young lord's house. She had seen that Hampstead had admired Marion, but she had not dreamed that it would be carried to such a length as this. But when he had knelt on the rug between them, leaning just a little towards the girl, and had looked up into the girl's face, smiling at his own little joke, but with his face full of love;—then she had known. And when Marion had whispered the one word, with her little fingers lingering within the young lord's touch, then she had known. It was not the young lord only who had given way to the softness of the moment. If evil had been done, she had done it; and it seemed as though evil had certainly been done. If much evil had been done, how could she forgive herself?

And what were Marion's thoughts? Did she feel that an evil had been done, an evil for which there could never be a cure found? She would have so assured herself, had she as yet become aware of the full power and depth and mortal nature of the wound she had received. For such a wound, for such a hurt, there is but one cure, and of that she certainly would

have entertained no hope. But, as it will sometimes be that a man shall in his flesh receive a fatal injury, of which he shall for awhile think that only some bruise has pained him, some scratch annoyed him; that a little time, with ointment and a plaister, will give him back his body as sound as ever; but then after a short space it becomes known to him that a deadly gangrene is affecting his very life; so will it be with a girl's heart. She did not yet,—not yet,—tell herself that half-a-dozen gentle words, that two or three soft glances, that a touch of a hand, the mere presence of a youth whose comeliness was endearing to the eye, had mastered and subdued all that there was of Marion Fay. But it was so. Not for a moment did her mind run away, as they were taken homewards, from the object of her unconscious idolatry. Had she behaved ill?—that was her regret! He had been so gracious;—that was her joy! Then there came a pang from the wound, though it was not as yet a pang as of death. What right had such a one as she to receive even an idle word of compliment from a man such as was Lord Hampstead? What could he be to her, or she to him? He had his high mission to complete, his great duties to perform, and doubtless would find some noble lady as a fit mother for his children. He had come across her path for a moment, and she could not but remember him for ever! There was something of an idea present to her that love would now be beyond her reach. But the pain necessarily attached to such an idea had not as yet reached her. There came something of a regret that fortune had placed her so utterly beyond his notice;—but she was sure of this, sure of this, that if the chance were offered to her, she would not mar his greatness by accepting the priceless boon of his love. But why,—why had he

been so tender to her? Then she thought of what were the ways of men, and of what she had heard of them. It had been bad for her to go abroad thus with her poor foolish softness, with her girl's untried tenderness,—that thus she should be affected by the first chance smile that had been thrown to her by one of those petted darlings of Fortune! And then she was brought round to that same resolution which was at the moment forming itself in her father's mind;—that it would have been better for her had she not allowed herself to be taken to Hendon Hall. Then they were in Paradise Row, and were put down at their separate doors with but few words of farewell to each other.

“They have just come home,” said Clara Demijohn, rushing into her mother's bedroom. “You'll find it is quite true. They have been dining with the lord!”

CHAPTER XXII.

AGAIN AT TRAFFORD.

THE meeting between Hampstead and his sister was affectionate and, upon the whole, satisfactory, though it was necessary that a few words should be spoken which could hardly be pleasant in themselves. “I had a dinner-party here last night,” he said laughing, desirous of telling her something of George Roden,—and something also of Marion Fay.

“Who were the guests?”

“Roden was here.” Then there was silence. She was glad that her lover had been one of the guests, but she was not as yet moved to say anything respecting him. “And his mother.”

“I am sure I shall like his mother,” said Lady Frances.

"I have mentioned it," continued her brother, speaking with unusual care, "because, in compliance with the agreement I made at Trafford, I cannot ask him here again at present."

"I am sorry that I should be in your way, John."

"You are not in my way, as I think you know. Let us say no more than that at present. Then I had a singular old Quaker, named Zachary Fay, an earnest, honest, but humble man, who blew me up instantly for talking slang."

"Where did you pick him up?"

"He comes out of the City," he said, not wishing to refer again to Paradise Row and the neighbourhood of the Rodens,—“and he brought his daughter.”

"A young lady?"

"Certainly a young lady."

"Ah, but young,—and beautiful?"

"Young,—and beautiful."

"Now you are laughing. I suppose she is some strong-minded, rather repulsive, middle-aged woman."

"As to the strength of her mind, I have not seen enough to constitute myself a judge," said Hampstead, almost with a tone of offence. "Why you should imagine her to be repulsive because she is a Quaker, or why middle-aged, I do not understand. She is not repulsive to me."

"Oh, John, I am so sorry! Now I know that you have found some divine beauty."

"We sometimes entertain angels unawares. I thought that I had done so when she took her departure."

"Are you in earnest?"

"I am quite in earnest as to the angel. Now I have to consult you as to a project." It may be remembered that Hampstead had spoken to his father as to the ex-

pediency of giving up his horses if he found that his means were not sufficient to keep up Hendon Hall, his yacht, and his hunting establishment in Northamptonshire. The Marquis, without saying a word to his son, had settled that matter, and Gorse Hall, with its stables, was continued. The proposition now made to Lady Frances was that she should go down with him and remain there for a week or two till she should find the place too dull. He had intended to fix an almost immediate day; but now he was debarred from this by his determination to see Marion yet once again before he took himself altogether beyond the reach of Holloway. The plan, therefore, though it was fixed as far as his own intention went and the assent of Lady Frances, was left undefined as to time. The more he thought of Holloway, and the difficulties of approaching Paradise Row, the more convinced he became that his only mode of approaching Marion must be through Mrs. Roden. He had taken two or three days to consider what would be the most appropriate manner of going through this operation, when on a sudden he was arrested by a letter from his father, begging his presence down at Trafford. The Marquis was ill, and was anxious to see his son. The letter in which the request was made was sad and plaintive throughout. He was hardly able to write, Lord Kingsbury said, because he was so unwell; but he had no one to write for him. Mr. Greenwood had made himself so disagreeable that he could no longer employ him for such purposes. "Your stepmother is causing me much vexation, which I do not think that I deserve from her." He then added that it would be necessary for him to have his lawyer down at Trafford, but that he wished to see Hampstead first in order that they might settle as to certain arrangements which were required in

regard to the disposition of the property. There were some things which Hampstead could not fail to perceive from this letter. He was sure that his father was alarmed as to his own condition, or he would not have thought of sending for the lawyer to Trafford. He had hitherto always been glad to seize an opportunity of running up to London when any matter of business had seemed to justify the journey. Then it occurred to his son that his father had rarely or ever spoken or written to him of his "stepmother." In certain moods the Marquis had been wont to call his wife either the Marchioness or Lady Kingsbury. When in good humour he had generally spoken of her to his son as "your mother." The injurious though strictly legal name now given to her was a certain index of abiding wrath. But things must have been very bad with the Marquis at Trafford when he had utterly discarded the services of Mr. Greenwood,—services to which he had been used for a time to which the memory of his son did not go back. Hampstead of course obeyed his father's injunctions, and went down to Trafford instantly, leaving his sister alone at Hendon Hall. He found the Marquis not in bed indeed, but confined to his own sitting-room, and to a very small bed-chamber which had been fitted up for him close to it. Mr. Greenwood had been anxious to give up his own rooms as being more spacious; but the offer had been peremptorily and almost indignantly refused. The Marquis had been unwilling to accept anything like a courtesy from Mr. Greenwood. Should he make up his mind to turn Mr. Greenwood out of the house,—and he had almost made up his mind to do so,—then he could do what he pleased with Mr. Greenwood's rooms. But he wasn't going to accept the loan of chambers in his own house as a favour from Mr. Greenwood.

Hampstead on arriving at the house saw the Marchioness for a moment before he went to his father. "I cannot tell how he is," said Lady Kingsbury, speaking in evident dudgeon. "He will hardly let me go near him. Doctor Spicer seems to think that we need not be alarmed. He shuts himself up in those gloomy rooms down-stairs. Of course it would be better for him to be off the ground floor, where he would have more light and air. But he has become so obstinate, that I do not know how to deal with him."

"He has always liked to live in the room next to Mr. Greenwood's."

"He has taken an absolute hatred to Mr. Greenwood. You had better not mention the poor old gentleman's name to him. Shut up as I am here, I have no one else to speak a word to, and for that reason, I suppose, he wishes to get rid of him. He is absolutely talking of sending the man away after having had him with him for nearly thirty years." In answer to all this Hampstead said almost nothing. He knew his step-mother, and was aware that he could do no service by telling her what he might find it to be his duty to say to his father as to Mr. Greenwood, or on any other subject. He did not hate his stepmother,—as she hated him. But he regarded her as one to whom it was quite useless to speak seriously as to the affairs of the family. He knew her to be prejudiced, ignorant, and falsely proud,—but he did not suppose her to be either wicked or cruel.

His father began almost instantly about Mr. Greenwood, so that it would have been quite impossible for him to follow Lady Kingsbury's advice on that matter had he been ever so well minded. "Of course I'm ill," he said; "I suffer so much from sickness and dyspepsia

that I can eat nothing. Doctor Spicer seems to think that I should get better if I did not worry myself; but there are so many things to worry me. The conduct of that man is abominable."

"What man, sir?" asked Hampstead, — who knew, however, very well what was coming.

"That clergyman," said Lord Kingsbury, pointing in the direction of Mr. Greenwood's room.

"He does not come to you, sir, unless you send for him?"

"I haven't seen him for the last five days, and I don't care if I never see him again."

"How has he offended you, sir?"

"I gave him my express injunctions that he should not speak of your sister either to me or the Marchioness. He gave me his solemn promise, and I know very well that they are talking about her every hour of the day."

"Perhaps that is not his fault."

"Yes, it is. A man needn't talk to a woman unless he likes. It is downright impudence on his part. Your stepmother comes to me every day, and never leaves me without abusing Fanny."

"That is why I thought it better that Fanny should come to me."

"And then, when I argue with her, she always tells me what Mr. Greenwood says about it. Who cares about Mr. Greenwood? What business has Mr. Greenwood to interfere in my family? He does not know how to behave himself, and he shall go."

"He has been here a great many years, sir," said Hampstead, pleading for the old man.

"Too many," said the Marquis. "When you've had a man about you so long as that, he is sure to take liberties."

"You must provide for him, sir, if he goes."

"I have thought of that. He must have something, of course. He has had three hundred a-year for the last ten years, and has had everything found for him down to his washing and his cab fares. For five-and-twenty years he has never paid for a bed or a meal out of his own pocket. What has he done with his money? He ought to be a rich man for his degree."

"What a man does with his money is, I suppose, no concern to those who pay it. It is supposed to have been earned, and there is an end of it as far as they are concerned."

"He shall have a thousand pounds," said the Marquis.

"That would hardly be liberal. I would think twice before I dismissed him, sir."

"I have thought a dozen times."

"I would let him remain," said Hampstead, "if only because he's a comfort to Lady Kingsbury. What does it matter though he does talk of Fanny? Were he to go she would talk to somebody else who might be perhaps less fit to hear her, and he would, of course, talk to everybody."

"Why has he not obeyed me?" demanded the Marquis, angrily. "It is I who have employed him. I have been his patron, and now he turns against me." Thus the Marquis went on till his strength would not suffice for any further talking. Hampstead found himself quite unable to bring him to any other subject on that day. He was sore with the injury done him in that he was not allowed to be the master in his own house.

On the next morning Hampstead heard from Dr. Spicer that his father was in a state of health very far from satisfactory. The doctor recommended that he

should be taken away from Trafford, and at last went so far as to say that his advice extended to separating his patient from Lady Kingsbury. "It is, of course, a very disagreeable subject," said the doctor, "for a medical man to meddle with; but, my lord, the truth is that Lady Kingsbury frets him. I don't, of course, care to hear what it is, but there is something wrong." Lord Hampstead, who knew very well what it was, did not attempt to contradict him. When, however, he spoke to his father of the expediency of change of air, the Marquis told him that he would rather die at Trafford than elsewhere.

That his father was really thinking of his death was only too apparent from all that was said and done. As to those matters of business, they were soon settled between them. There was, at any rate, that comfort to the poor man that there was no probability of any difference between him and his heir as to the property or as to money. Half-an-hour settled all that. Then came the time which had been arranged for Hampstead's return to his sister. But before he went there were conversations between him and Mr. Greenwood, between him and his stepmother, and between him and his father, to which, for the sake of our story, it may be as well to refer.

"I think your father is ill-treating me," said Mr. Greenwood. Mr. Greenwood had allowed himself to be talked into a thorough contempt and dislike for the young lord; so that he had almost brought himself to believe in those predictions as to the young lord's death in which Lady Kingsbury was always indulging. As a consequence of this, he now spoke in a voice very different from those obsequious tones which he had before been accustomed to use when he had regarded Lord Hampstead as his young patron.

"I am sure my father would never do that," said Hampstead, angrily.

"It looks very like it. I have devoted all the best of my life to his service, and he now talks of dismissing me as though I were no better than a servant."

"Whatever he does, he will, I am sure, have adequate cause for doing."

"I have done nothing but my duty. It is out of the question that a man in my position should submit to orders as to what he is to talk about and what not. It is natural that Lady Kingsbury should come to me in her troubles."

"If you will take my advice," said Lord Hampstead, in that tone of voice which always produces in the mind of the listener a determination that the special advice offered shall not be taken, "you will comply with my father's wishes while it suits you to live in his house. If you cannot do that, it would become you, I think, to leave it." In every word of this there was rebuke; and Mr. Greenwood, who did not like being rebuked, remembered it.

"Of course I am nobody in this house now," said the Marchioness in her last interview with her stepson. It is of no use to argue with an angry woman, and in answer to this Hampstead made some gentle murmur which was intended neither to assent or to dispute the proposition made to him. "Because I ventured to disapprove of Mr. Roden as a husband for your sister I have been shut up here, and not allowed to speak to any one."

"Fanny has left the house, so that she may no longer cause you annoyance by her presence."

"She has left the house in order that she may be near the abominable lover with whom you have furnished her."

"This is not true," said Hampstead, who was moved beyond his control by the double falseness of the accusation.

"Of course you can be insolent to me, and tell me that I speak falsehoods. It is part of your new creed that you should be neither respectful to a parent, nor civil to a lady."

"I beg your pardon, Lady Kingsbury,"—he had never called her Lady Kingsbury before,—“if I have been disrespectful or uncivil, but your statements were very hard to bear. Fanny’s engagement with Mr. Roden has not even received my sanction. Much less was it arranged or encouraged by me. She has not gone to Hendon Hall to be near Mr. Roden, with whom she had undertaken to hold no communication as long as she remains there with me. Both for my own sake and for hers I am bound to repudiate the accusation.” Then he went without further adieu, leaving with her a conviction that she had been treated with the greatest contumely by her husband’s rebellious heir.

Nothing could be sadder than the last words which the Marquis spoke to his son. “I don’t suppose, Hampstead, that we shall ever meet again in this world.”

“Oh, father!”

“I don’t think Mr. Spicer knows how bad I am.”

“Will you have Sir James down from London?”

“No Sir James can do me any good, I fear. It is ill ministering to a mind diseased.”

“Why, sir, should you have a mind diseased? With few men can things be said to be more prosperous than with you. Surely this affair of Fanny’s is not of such a nature as to make you feel that all things are bitter round you.”

"It is not that."

"What then? I hope I have not been a cause of grief to you?"

"No, my boy;—no. It irks me sometimes to think that I should have trained you to ideas which you have taken up too violently. But it is not that."

"My mother?"

"She has set her heart against me,—against you and Fanny. I feel that a division has been made between my two families. Why should my daughter be expelled from my own house? Why should I not be able to have you here, except as an enemy in the camp? Why am I to have that man take up arms against me, whom I have fed in idleness all his life?"

"I would not let him trouble my thoughts."

"When you are old and weak you will find it hard to banish thoughts that trouble you. As to going, where am I to go?"

"Come to Hendon."

"And leave her here with him, so that all the world shall say that I am running away from my own wife? Hendon is your house now, and this is mine;—and here I must stay till my time has come."

This was very sad, not as indicating the state of his father's health, as to which he was more disposed to take the doctor's opinion than that of the patient but as showing the infirmity of his father's mind. He had been aware of a certain weakness in his father's character,—a desire not so much for ruling as for seeming to rule all that were around him. The Marquis had wished to be thought a despot even when he had delighted in submitting himself to the stronger mind of his first wife. Now he felt the chains that were imposed upon him, so that they galled him when he could not throw them off.

All this was very sad to Hampstead; but it did not make him think that his father's health had in truth been seriously affected.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE IRREPRESSIBLE CROCKER.

HAMPSTEAD remained nearly a fortnight down at Trafford, returning to Hendon only a few days before Christmas. Crocker, the Post Office clerk, came back to his duties at the same time, but, as was the custom with him, stole a day more than belonged to him, and thus incurred the frowns of Mr. Jerningham and the heavy wrath of the great Æolus. The Æoluses of the Civil Service are necessarily much exercised in their minds by such irregularities. To them personally it matters not at all whether one or another young man may be neglectful. It may be known to such a one that a Crocker may be missed from his seat without any great injury,—possibly with no injury at all,—to the Queen's service. There are Crockers whom it would be better to pay for their absence than their presence. This Æolus thought it was so with this Crocker. Then why not dismiss Crocker, and thus save the waste of public money? But there is a necessity,—almost a necessity,—that the Crockers of the world should live. They have mothers, or perhaps even wives, with backs to be clothed and stomachs to be fed, or perhaps with hearts to be broken. There is, at any rate, a dislike to proceed to the ultimate resort of what may be called the capital punishment of the Civil Service. To threaten, to frown, to scold, to make a young man's life a burden to him, are all within the compass of an official Æolus. You would think occasionally that such a one was resolved

to turn half the clerks in his office out into the street, —so loud are the threats. In regard to individuals he often is resolved to do so at the very next fault. But when the time comes his heart misgives him. Even an Æolus is subject to mercy, and at last his conscience becomes so callous to his first imperative duty of protecting the public service, that it grows to be a settled thing with him, that though a man's life is to be made a burden to him, the man is not to be actually dismissed. But there are men to whom you cannot make their life a burden,—men upon whom no frowns, no scoldings, no threats operate at all; and men unfortunately sharp enough to perceive what is that ultimate decision to which their Æolus had been brought. Such a one was our Crocker, who cared very little for the blusterings. On this occasion he had remained away for the sake of having an additional day with the Braeside Harriers, and when he pleaded a bilious headache no one believed him for an instant. It was in vain for Æolus to tell him that a man subject to health so precarious was altogether unfitted for the Civil Service. Crocker had known beforehand exactly what was going to be said to him, and had discounted it at its exact worth. Even in the presence of Mr. Jerningham he spoke openly of the day's hunting, knowing that Mr. Jerningham would prefer his own ease to the trouble of renewed complaint. "If you would sit at your desk now that you have come back, and go on with your docketing, instead of making everybody else idle, it would be a great deal better," said Mr. Jerningham.

"Then my horse took the wall in a fly, and old Amblethwaite crept over afterwards," continued Crocker, standing with his back to the fire, utterly disregarding Mr. Jerningham's admonitions.

On his first entrance into the room Crocker had shaken hands with Mr. Jerningham, then with Bobbin and Geraghty, and at last he came to Roden, with whom he would willingly have struck up terms of affectionate friendship had it been possible for him to do so. He had resolved that it should be so, but when the moment came his courage a little failed him. He had made himself very offensive to Roden at their last interview, and could see at a glance that Roden remembered it. As far as his own feelings were concerned such "tiffs," as he called them, went for nothing. He had, indeed, no feelings, and was accustomed to say that he liked the system of give and take,—meaning that he liked being impudent to others, and did not care how impudent others might be to him. This toughness and insolence are as sharp as needles to others who do not possess the same gifts. Roden had learned to detest the presence of the young man, to be sore when he was even spoken to, and yet did not know how to put him down. You may have a fierce bull shut up. You may muzzle a dog that will bite. You may shoot a horse that you cannot cure of biting and tearing. But you cannot bring yourself to spend a morning in hunting a bug or killing a flea. Crocker had made himself a serious annoyance even to Lord Hampstead, though their presence together had only been for a very short time. But Roden had to pass his life at the same desk with the odious companion. Absolutely to cut him, to let it be known all through the office that they two did not speak, was to make too much of the matter. But yet it was essentially necessary for his peace that some step should be taken to save himself from the man's insolence. On the present occasion he nodded his head to Crocker, being careful not to lay the pen down from his fingers. "Ain't you

going to give us your hand, old fellow?" said Crocker, putting on his best show of courage.

"I don't know that I am," said Roden. "Perhaps some of these days you may learn to make yourself less disagreeable."

"I'm sure I've always meant to be very friendly, especially with you," said Crocker; "but it is so hard to get what one says taken in the proper sense."

After this not a word was spoken between the two all the morning. This happened on a Saturday,—Saturday, the 20th of December, on which day Hampstead was to return to his own house. Punctually at one Crocker left his desk, and with a comic bow of mock courtesy to Mr. Jerningham, stuck his hat on the side of his head, and left the office. His mind, as he took himself home to his lodgings, was full of Roden's demeanour towards him. Since he had become assured that his brother clerk was engaged to marry Lady Frances Trafford, he was quite determined to cultivate an enduring and affectionate friendship. But what steps should he take to recover the ground which he had lost? It occurred to him now that while he was in Cumberland he had established quite an intimacy with Lord Hampstead, and he thought that it would be well to use Lord Hampstead's acknowledged good nature for recovering the ground which he had lost with his brother clerk.

* * * * *

At about three o'clock that afternoon, when Lady Frances was beginning to think that the time of her brother's arrival was near at hand, the servant came into the drawing-room, and told her that a gentleman had called, and was desirous of seeing her. "What gentleman?" asked Lady Frances. "Has he sent his name?"

“No, my lady; but he says,—he says that he is a clerk from the Post Office.” Lady Frances was at the moment so dismayed that she did not know what answer to give. There could be but one Post Office clerk who should be anxious to see her, and she had felt from the tone of the servant’s voice that he had known that it was her lover who had called. Everybody knew that the Post Office clerk was her lover. Some immediate answer was necessary. She quite understood the pledge that her brother had made on her behalf; and, though she had not herself made any actual promise, she felt that she was bound not to receive George Roden. But yet she could not bring herself to turn him away from the door, and so to let the servant suppose that she was ashamed to see him to whom she had given the promise of her hand. “You had better show the gentleman in,” she said at last, with a voice that almost trembled. A moment afterwards the door was opened, and Mr. Crocker entered the room!

She had endeavoured in the minute which had been allowed her to study the manner in which she should receive her lover. As she heard the approaching footsteps, she prepared herself. She had just risen from her seat, nearly risen, when the strange man appeared. It has to be acknowledged that she was grievously disappointed, although she had told herself that Roden ought not to have come to her. What woman is there will not forgive her lover for coming, even though he certainly should not have come? What woman is there will fail to receive a stranger with hard looks when a stranger shall appear to her instead of an expected lover? “Sir?” she said, standing as he walked up the room and made a low bow to her as he took his position before her.

Crocker was dressed up to the eyes, and wore yellow kid gloves. "Lady Frances," he said, "I am Mr. Crocker, Mr. Samuel Crocker, of the General Post Office. You may not perhaps have heard of me from my friend, Mr. Roden?"

"No, indeed, sir."

"You might have done so, as we sit in the same room and at the same desk. Or you may remember meeting me at dinner at your uncle's castle in Cumberland."

"Is anything,—anything the matter with Mr. Roden?"

"Not in the least, my lady. I had the pleasure of leaving him in very good health about two hours since. There is nothing at all to occasion your ladyship the slightest uneasiness." A dark frown came across her brow as she heard the man talk thus freely of her interest in George Roden's condition. She no doubt had betrayed her own secret as far as there was a secret; but she was not on that account the less angry because he had forced her to do so.

"Has Mr. Roden sent you as a messenger?" she asked.

"No, my lady; no. That would not be at all probable. I am sure he would very much rather come with any message of his own." At this he sniggered most offensively. "I called with a hope of seeing your brother, Lord Hampstead, with whom I may take the liberty of saying that I have a slight acquaintance."

"Lord Hampstead is not at home."

"So the servant told me. Then it occurred to me that as I had come all the way down from London for a certain purpose, to ask a little favour from his lordship, and as I was not fortunate enough to find his lordship at home, I might ask the same from your ladyship."

"There can be nothing that I can do for you, sir."

"You can do it, my lady, much better than any one else in the world. You can be more powerful in this matter even than his lordship."

"What can it be?" asked Lady Frances.

"If your ladyship will allow me I will sit down, as the story I have to tell is somewhat particular." It was impossible to refuse him the use of a chair, and she could therefore only bow as he seated himself. "I and George Roden, my lady, have known each other intimately for these ever so many years." Again she bowed her head. "And I may say that we used to be quite pals. When two men sit at the same desk together they ought to be thick as thieves. See what a cat and dog life it is else! Don't you think so, my lady?"

"I know nothing of office life. As I don't think that I can help you, perhaps you wouldn't mind—going away?"

"Oh, my lady, you must hear me to the end, because you are just the person who can help me. Of course as you two are situated he would do anything you were to bid him. Now he has taken it into his head to be very huffy with me."

"Indeed I can do nothing in the matter," she said, in a tone of deep distress.

"If you would only just tell him that I have never meant to offend him? I am sure I don't know what it is that has come up. It may be that I said a word in joke about Lord Hampstead, only that there really could not have been anything in that. Nobody could have a more profound respect for his lordship's qualities than I have, and I may say the same for your ladyship most sincerely. I have always thought it a great feather in Roden's cap that he should be so closely connected,—more than closely, I may say,—with your noble family."

What on earth was she to do with a man who would

go on talking to her, making at every moment insolent allusions to the most cherished secret of her heart? "I must beg you to go away and leave me, sir," he said. "My brother will be here almost immediately."

This had escaped from her with a vain idea that the man would receive it as a threat,—that he would think probably that her brother would turn him out of the house for his insolence. In this she was altogether mistaken. He had no idea that he was insolent. "Then perhaps you will allow me to wait for his lordship," he said.

"Oh dear, no! He may come or he may not. You really cannot wait. You ought not to have come at all."

"But for the sake of peace, my lady! One word from your fair lips——." Lady Frances could endure it no longer. She got up from her seat and walked out of the room, leaving Mr. Crocker planted in his chair. In the hall she found one of the servants, whom she told to "take that man to the front door at once." The servant did as he was bid, and Crocker was ushered out of the house without any feeling on his part that he had misbehaved himself.

Crocker had hardly got beyond the grounds when Hampstead did in truth return. The first words spoken between him and his sister of course referred to their father's health. "He is unhappy rather than ill," said Hampstead.

"Is it about me?" she asked.

"No; not at all about you in the first instance."

"What does that mean?"

"It is not because of you; but from what others say about you."

"Mamma?" she asked.

"Yes; and Mr. Greenwood."

"Does he interfere?"

"I am afraid he does;—not directly with my father, but through her ladyship, who daily tells my father what the stupid old man says. Lady Kingsbury is most irrational and harassing. I have always thought her to be silly, but now I cannot keep myself from feeling that she misbehaves herself grievously. She does everything she can to add to his annoyance."

"That is very bad."

"It is bad. He can turn Mr. Greenwood out of the house if Mr. Greenwood becomes unbearable. But he cannot turn his wife out."

"Could he not come here?"

"I am afraid not,—without bringing her too. She has taken it into her stupid head that you and I are disgracing the family. As for me, she seems to think that I am actually robbing her own boys of their rights. I would do anything for them, or even for her, if I could comfort her; but she is determined to look upon us as enemies. My father says that it will worry him into his grave."

"Poor papa!"

"We can run away, but he can not. I became very angry when I was there, both with her ladyship and that pestilential old clergyman, and told them both pretty much what I thought. I have the comfort of knowing that I have two bitter enemies in the house."

"Can they hurt you?"

"Not in the least,—except in this, that they can teach those little boys to regard me as an enemy. I would fain have had my brothers left to me. Mr. Greenwood, and I must now say her ladyship also, are nothing to me."

It was not till after dinner that the story was told about Crocker. "Think what I must have felt when I

was told that a clerk from the Post Office wanted to see me!"

"And then that brute Crocker was shown in?" asked Hampstead.

"Do you really know him?"

"Know him! I should rather think so. Don't you remember him at Castle Hautboy?"

"Not in the least. But he told me that he had been there."

"He never would leave me. He absolutely drove me out of the country because he would follow me about when we were hunting. He insulted me so grievously that I had to turn tail and run away from him. What did he want of me?"

"To intercede for him with George Roden."

"He is an abominable man, irrepressible, so thick-skinned that you cannot possibly get at him so as to hurt him. It is of no use telling him to keep his distance, for he does not in the least know what you mean. I do not doubt that he has left the house with a conviction that he has gained a sincere friend in you."

* * * * *

It was now more than a fortnight since Marion Fay had dined at Hendon, and Hampstead felt that unless he could succeed in carrying on the attack which he had commenced, any little beginning of a friendship which he had made with the Quaker would be obliterated by the length of time. If she thought about him at all, she must think that he was very indifferent to let so long a time pass by without any struggle on his part to see her again. There had been no word of love spoken. He had been sure of that. But still there had been something of affectionate intercourse which she could not have failed to recognize. What must she

think of him if he allowed that to pass away without any renewal, without an attempt at carrying it further? When she had bade him go in out of the cold there had been something in her voice which had made him feel that she was in truth anxious for him. Now more than a fortnight had gone, and there had been no renewal! "Fanny," he said, "how would it be if we were to ask those Quakers to dine here on Christmas Day?"

"It would be odd, wouldn't it, as they are strangers, and dined here so lately?"

"People like that do not stand on ceremony at all. I don't see why they shouldn't come. I could say that you want to make their acquaintance."

"Would you ask them alone?"

In that he felt that the great difficulty lay. The Fays would hardly come without Mrs. Roden, and the Rodens could not be asked. "One doesn't always ask the same people to meet each other."

"It would be very odd, and I don't think they'd come," said Lady Frances, gravely. Then after a pause she went on. "I fear, John, that there is more in it than mere dinner company."

"Certainly there is," he said boldly;—"much more in it."

"You are not in love with the Quaker's daughter?"

"I rather think I am. When I have seen her three or four times more, I shall be able to find out. You may be sure of this, that I mean to see her three or four times more, and at any rate one of the times must be before I go down to Gorse Hall." Then of course she knew the whole truth. He did, however, give up the idea as to the Christmas dinner-party, having arrived at the belief, after turning the matter over in his mind, that Zachary Fay would not bring his daughter again so soon.

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. RODEN'S ELOQUENCE.

ON Sunday Hampstead was nervous and fidgety. He had at one time thought that it would be the very day for him to go to Holloway. He would be sure to find Mrs. Roden at home after church, and then, if he could carry things to the necessary length, he might also see Zachary Fay. But on consideration it appeared to him that Sunday would not suit his purpose. George Roden would be there, and would be sadly in the way. And the Quaker himself would be in the way, as it would be necessary that he should have some preliminary interview with Marion before anything could be serviceably said to her father. He was driven, therefore, to postpone his visit. Nor would Monday do, as he knew enough of the manners of Paradise Row to be aware that on Monday Mrs. Vincent would certainly be there. It would be his object, if things could be made to go pleasantly, first to see Mrs. Roden for a few minutes, and then to spend as much of the afternoon as might be possible with Marion Fay. He therefore fixed on the Tuesday for his purpose, and having telegraphed about the country for his horses, groom, and other appurtenances, he went down to Leighton on the Monday, and consoled himself with a day's hunting with the staghounds.

On his return his sister spoke to him very seriously as to her own affairs. "Is not this almost silly, John, about Mr. Roden not coming here?"

"Not silly at all, according to my ideas."

"All the world knows that we are engaged. The very servants have heard of it. That horrid young man who came from the Post Office was aware of it."

"What has all that to do with it?"

"If it has been made public in that way, what can be the object of keeping us apart? Mamma no doubt told her sister, and Lady Persiflage has published it everywhere. Her daughter is going to marry a duke, and it has crowned her triumph to let it be known that I am going to marry only a Post Office clerk. I don't begrudge her that in the least. But as they have talked about it so much, they ought, at any rate, to let me have my Post Office clerk."

"I have nothing to say about it one way or the other," said Hampstead. "I say nothing about it, at any rate now."

"What do you mean by that, John?"

"When I saw how miserable you were at Trafford I did my best to bring you away. But I could only bring you here on an express stipulation that you should not meet George Roden while you were in my house. If you can get my father's consent to your meeting him, then that part of the contract will be over."

"I don't think I made any promise."

"I understand it so."

"I said nothing to papa on the subject,—and I do not remember that I made any promise to you. I am sure I did not."

"I promised for you." To this she was silent. "Are you going to ask him to come here?"

"Certainly not. But if he did come, how could I refuse to see him? I thought that he was here on Saturday, and I told Richard to admit him. I could not send him away from the door."

"I do not think he will come unless he is asked," said Hampstead. Then the conversation was over.

On the following day, at two o'clock, Lord Hampstead

again started for Holloway. On this occasion he drove over, and left his trap and servant at the "Duchess of Edinburgh." He was so well known in the neighbourhood now as hardly to be able to hope to enter on the domains of Paradise Row without being recognized. He felt that it was hard that his motions should be watched, telling himself that it was one of the evils belonging to an hereditary nobility; but he must accept this mischance as he did others, and he walked up the street trying to look as though he didn't know that his motions were being watched first from Number Fifteen as he passed it, and then from Number Ten opposite, as he stood at Mrs. Roden's door.

Mrs. Roden was at home, and received him, of course, with her most gracious smile; but her heart sank within her as she saw him, for she felt sure that he had come in pursuit of Marion Fay. "It is very kind of you to call," she said. "I had heard from George that you had gone down into the country since we had the pleasure of dining with you."

"Yes; my father has been unwell, and I had to stay with him a few days or I should have been here sooner. You got home all of you quite well?"

"Oh, yes."

"Miss Fay did not catch cold?"

"Not at all;—though I fear she is hardly strong."

"She is not ill, I hope?"

"Oh, no; not that. But she lives here very quietly, and I doubt whether the excitement of going out is good for her."

"There was not much excitement at Hendon Hall, I think," he said, laughing.

"Not for you, but for her perhaps. In appreciating our own condition we are so apt to forget what is the

condition of others! To Marion Fay it was a strange event to have to dine at your house,—and strange also to receive little courtesies such as yours. It is hard for you to conceive how strongly the nature of such a girl may be effected by novelties. I have almost regretted, Lord Hampstead, that I should have consented to take her there.”

“Has she said anything?”

“Oh, no; there was nothing for her to say. You are not to suppose that any harm has been done.”

“What harm could have been done?” he asked. Of what nature was the harm of which Mrs. Roden was speaking? Could it be that Marion had made any sign of altered feelings; had declared in any way her liking or disliking; had given outward testimony of thoughts which would have been pleasant to him,—or perhaps unpleasant,—had he known them?

“No harm, of course,” said Mrs. Roden;—“only to a nature such as hers all excitement is evil.”

“I cannot believe that,” he said, after a pause. “Now and then in the lives of all of us there must come moments of excitement which cannot be all evil. What would Marion say if I were to tell her that I loved her?”

“I hope you will not do that, my lord.”

“Why should you hope so? What right have you to hope so? If I do love her, is it not proper that I should tell her?”

“But it would not be proper that you should love her.”

“There, Mrs. Roden, I take the liberty of declaring that you are altogether in the wrong, and that you speak without due consideration.”

“Do I, my lord?”

“I think so. Why am I not to be allowed the ordinary privilege of a man,—that of declaring my passion

to a woman when I meet one who seems in all things to fulfil the image of perfection which I have formed for myself,—when I see a girl that I fancy I can love?"

"Ah, there is the worst! It is only a fancy."

"I will not be accused in that way without defending myself. Let it be fancy or what not, I love Marion Fay, and I have come here to tell her so. If I can make any impression on her I shall come again and tell her father so. I am here now because I think that you can help me. If you will not, I shall go on without your help."

"What can I do?"

"Go to her with me now, at once. You say that excitement is bad for her. The excitement will be less if you will come with me to her house."

Then there was a long pause in the conversation, during which Mrs. Roden was endeavouring to determine what might be her duty at this moment. She certainly did not think that it would be well that Lord Hampstead, the eldest son of the Marquis of Kingsbury, should marry Marion Fay. She was quite sure that she had all the world with her there. Were any one to know that she had assisted in arranging such a marriage, that any one would certainly condemn her. That would assuredly be the case, not only with the young lord's family, not only with others of the young lord's order, but with all the educated world of Great Britain. How could it be that such a one as Marion Fay should be a fitting wife for such a one as Lord Hampstead? Marion Fay had undoubtedly great gifts of her own. She was beautiful, intelligent, sweet-minded, and possessed of natural delicacy,—so much so that to Mrs. Roden herself she had become as dear almost as a daughter; but it was impossible that she should have either the education or the manners fit for the wife of a great English peer. Though

her manners might be good and her education excellent, they were not those required for that special position. And then there was cause for other fears. Marion's mother and brothers and sisters had all died young. The girl herself had hitherto seemed to escape the scourge under which they perished. But occasionally there would rise to her cheeks a bright colour, which for the moment would cause Mrs. Roden's heart to sink within her. Occasionally there would be heard from her not a cough, but that little preparation for coughing which has become so painfully familiar to the ears of those whose fate it has been to see their beloved ones gradually fade from presumed health. She had already found herself constrained to say a word or two to the old Quaker, not telling him that she feared any coming evil, but hinting that change of air would certainly be beneficial to such a one as Marion. Acting under this impulse, he had taken her during the inclemency of the past spring to the Isle of Wight. She was minded gradually to go on with this counsel, so as if possible to induce the father to send his girl out of London for some considerable portion of the year. If this were so, how could she possibly encourage Lord Hampstead in his desire to make Marion his wife?

And then, as to the girl herself, could it be for her happiness that she should be thus lifted into a strange world, a world that would be hard and ungracious to her, and in which it might be only too probable that the young lord should see her defects when it would be too late for either of them to remedy the evil that had been done? She had thought something of all this before, having recognized the possibility of such a step as this after what she had seen at Hendon Hall. She had told herself that it would be well at any rate to dis-

courage any such idea in Marion's heart, and had spoken jokingly of the gallantry of men of rank. Marion had smiled sweetly as she had listened to her friend's words, and had at once said that such manners were at any rate pretty and becoming in one so placed as Lord Hampstead. There had been something in this to make Mrs. Roden almost fear that her words had been taken as intending too much,—that Marion had accepted them as a caution against danger. Not for worlds would she have induced the girl to think that any danger was apprehended. But now the danger had come, and it behoved Mrs. Roden if possible to prevent the evil. "Will you come across with me now?" said Hampstead, having sat silent in his chair while these thoughts were passing through the lady's mind.

"I think not, my lord."

"Why not, Mrs. Roden? Will it not be better than that I should go alone?"

"I hope you will not go at all."

"I shall go,—certainly. I consider myself bound by all laws of honesty to tell her what she has done to me. She can then judge what may be best for herself."

"Do not go at any rate to-day, Lord Hampstead. Let me beg at least as much as that of you. Consider the importance of the step you will be taking."

"I have thought of it," said he.

"Marion is as good as gold."

"I know she is."

"Marion, I say, is as good as gold; but is it likely that any girl should remain untouched and undazzled by such an offer as you can make her?"

"Touched I hope she may be. As for dazzled,—I do not believe in it in the least. There are eyes which no false lights can dazzle."

"But if she were touched, as would no doubt be the case," said Mrs. Roden, "could it be well that you with such duties before you should marry the daughter of Zachary Fay? Listen to me a moment," she continued, as he attempted to interrupt her. "I know what you would say, and I sympathize with much of it; but it cannot be well for society that classes should be mixed together suddenly and roughly."

"What roughness would there be?" he asked.

"As lords and ladies are at present, as dukes are, and duchesses, and such like, there would be a roughness to them in having Marion Fay presented to them as one of themselves. Lords have married low-born girls, I know, and the wives have been contented with a position which has almost been denied to them, or only grudgingly accorded. I have known something of that, my lord, and have felt—at any rate I have seen—its bitterness. Marion Fay would fade and sink to nothing if she were subjected to such contumely. To be Marion Fay is enough for her. To be your wife, and not to be thought fit to be your wife, would not be half enough."

"She shall be thought fit."

"You can make her Lady Hampstead, and demand that she shall be received at Court. You can deck her with diamonds, and cause her to be seated high in honour according to your own rank. But could you induce your father's wife to smile on her?" In answer to this he was dumb. "Do you think she would be contented if your father's wife were to frown on her?"

"My father's wife is not everybody."

"She would necessarily be much to your wife. Take a week, my lord, or a month, and think upon it. She expects nothing from you yet, and it is still in your power to save her from unhappiness."

"I would make her happy, Mrs. Roden."

"Think about it;—think about it."

"And I would make myself happy also. You count my feelings as being nothing in the matter."

"Nothing as compared with hers. You see how plainly I deal with you. Let me say that for a time your heart will be sore;—that you do in truth love this girl so as to feel that she is necessary to your happiness. Do you not know that if she were placed beyond your reach you would recover from that sting? The duties of the world would still be open to you. Being a man, you would still have before you many years for recovery before your youth had departed from you. Of course you would find some other woman, and be happy with her. For her, if she came to shipwreck in this venture, there would be no other chance."

"I would make this chance enough for her."

"So you think; but if you will look abroad you will see that the perils to her happiness which I have attempted to describe are not vain. I can say no more, my lord, but can only beg that you will take some little time to think of it before you put the thing out of your own reach. If she had once accepted your love I know that you would never go back."

"Never."

"Therefore think again while there is time." He slowly dragged himself up from his chair, and left her almost without a word at parting. She had persuaded him—to take another week. It was not that he doubted in the least his own purpose, but he did not know how to gainsay her as to this small request. In that frame of mind which is common to young men when they do not get all that they want, angry, disappointed, and

foiled, he went down-stairs, and opened the front door,—and there on the very steps he met Marion Fay.

“Marion,” he said, pouring all the tenderness of his heart into his voice.

“My lord?”

“Come in, Marion,—for one moment.” Then she followed him into the little passage, and there they stood. “I had come over to ask you how you are after our little party.”

“I am quite well;—and you?”

“I have been away with my father, or I should have come sooner.”

“Nay;—it was not necessary that you should trouble yourself.”

“It is necessary;—it is necessary; or I should be troubled very much. I am troubled.” She stood there looking down on the ground as though she were biding her time, but she did not speak to him. “She would not come with me,” he said, pointing up the stairs on which Mrs. Roden was now standing. “She has told me that it is bad that I should come; but I will come one day soon.” He was almost beside himself with love as he was speaking. The girl was so completely after his own heart as he stood there close to her, filled with her influences, that he was unable to restrain himself.

“Come up, Marion dear,” said Mrs. Roden, speaking from the landing. “It is hardly fair to keep Lord Hampstead standing in the passage.”

“It is most unfair,” said Marion. “Good day, my lord.”

“I will stand here till you come down to me, unless you will speak to me again. I will not be turned out while you are here. Marion, you are all the world to me. I love you with my whole, whole heart. I had come here, dear, to tell you so;—but she has delayed

me. She made me promise that I would not come again for a week, as though weeks or years could change me? Say one word to me, Marion. One word shall suffice now, and then I will go. Marion, can you love me?"

"Come to me, Marion, come to me," said Mrs. Roden. "Do not answer him now."

"No," said Marion, looking up, and laying her hand gently on the sleeve of his coat. "I will not answer him now. It is too sudden. I must think of words to answer such a speech. Lord Hampstead, I will go to her now."

"But I shall hear from you."

"You shall come to me again, and I will tell you."

"To-morrow?"

"Nay; but give me a day or two. On Friday I will be ready with my answer."

"You will give me your hand, Marion." She gave it to him, and he covered it with kisses. "Only have this in your mind, fixed as fate, that no man ever loved a woman more truly than I love you. No man was ever more determined to carry out his purpose. I am in your hands. Think if you cannot dare to trust yourself into mine." Then he left her, and went back to the "Duchess of Edinburgh," not thinking much of the eyes which might be looking at him.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARION'S VIEWS ABOUT MARRIAGE.

WHEN Lord Hampstead shut the door behind him, Marion went slowly up the stairs to Mrs. Roden, who had returned to her drawing-room. When she entered, her friend was standing near the door, with anxiety

plainly written on her face,—with almost more than anxiety. She took Marion by the hand and, kissing her, led her to the sofa. “I would have stopped him if I could,” she said.

“Why should you have stopped him?”

“Such things should be considered more.”

“He had made it too late for considering to be of service. I knew, I almost knew, that he would come.”

“You did?”

“I can tell myself now that I did, though I could not say it even to myself before.” There was a smile on her face as she spoke, and, though her colour was heightened, there was none of that peculiar flush which Mrs. Roden so greatly feared to see. Nor was there any special excitement in her manner. There was no look either of awe or of triumph. She seemed to take it as a matter of course, quite as much at least as any Lady Amaldina could have done, who might have been justified by her position in expecting that some young noble eldest son would fling himself at her feet.

“And are you ready with your answer?” Marion turned her eyes towards her friend, but made no immediate reply. “My darling girl,—for you in truth are very dear to me,—much thought should be given to such an appeal as that before any answer is made.”

“I have thought.”

“And are you ready?”

“I think so. Dear Mrs. Roden, do not look at me like that. If I do not say more to tell you immediately it is because I am not perhaps quite sure;—not sure, at any rate, of the reasons I may have to give. I will come to you to-morrow, and then I will tell you.”

There was room then at any rate for hope! If the girl had not quite resolved to grasp at the high destiny

offered to her, it was still her friend's duty to say something that might influence her.

"Marion, dear!"

"Say all that you think, Mrs. Roden. Surely you know that I know that whatever may come from you will come in love. I have no mother, and to whom can I go better than to you to fill a mother's place?"

"Dear Marion, it is thus I feel towards you. What I would say to you I would say to my own child. There are great differences in the ranks of men."

"I have felt that."

"And though I do in my honest belief think that the best and honestest of God's creatures are not always to be found among so-called nobles, yet I think that a certain great respect should be paid to those whom chance has raised to high places."

"Do I not respect him?"

"I hope so. But perhaps you may not show it best by loving him."

"As to that, it is a matter in which one can, perhaps, hardly control oneself. If asked for love it will come from you like water from a fountain. Unless it be so, then it cannot come at all."

"That surely is a dangerous doctrine for a young woman."

"Young women, I think, are compassed by many dangers," said Marion; "and I know but one way of meeting them."

"What way is that, dear?"

"I will tell you, if I can find how to tell it, to-morrow."

"There is one point, Marion, on which I feel myself bound to warn you, as I endeavoured also to warn him. To him my words seemed to have availed nothing; but

you, I think, are more reasonable. Unequal marriages never make happy either the one side or the other."

"I hope I may do nothing to make him unhappy."

"Unhappy for a moment you must make him;—for a month, perhaps, or for a year; though it were for years, what would that be to his whole life?"

"For years?" said Marion. "No, not for years. Would it be more than for days, do you think?"

"I cannot tell what may be the nature of the young man's heart;—nor can you. But as to that, it cannot be your duty to take much thought. Of his lasting welfare you are bound to think."

"Oh, yes; of that certainly;—of that above all things."

"I mean as to this world. Of what may come afterwards to one so little known we here can hardly dare to speak,—or even to think. But a girl, when she has been asked to marry a man, is bound to think of his welfare in this life."

"I cannot but think of his eternal welfare also," said Marion.

"Unequal marriages are always unhappy," said Mrs. Roden, repeating her great argument.

"Always?"

"I fear so. Could you be happy if his great friends, his father, and his stepmother, and all those high-born lords and ladies who are connected with him,—could you be happy if they frowned on you?"

"What would their frowns be to me? If he smiled I should be happy. If the world were light and bright to him, it would certainly be light and bright to me."

"I thought so once, Marion. I argued with myself once just as you are arguing now."

"Nay, Mrs. Roden, I am hardly arguing."

"It was just so that I spoke to myself, saying that the

joy which I took in a man's love would certainly be enough for my happiness. But oh, alas! I fell to the ground. I will tell you now more of myself than I have told any one for many a year, more even than I have told George. I will tell you because I know that I can trust your faith."

"Yes; you can trust me," said Marion.

"I also married greatly; greatly, as the world's honours are concerned. In mere rank I stood as a girl higher perhaps than you do now. But I was lifted out of my own degree, and in accepting the name which my husband gave me I assured myself that I would do honour to it, at any rate by my conduct. I did it no dishonour;—but my marriage was most unfortunate."

"Was he good?" asked Marion.

"He was weak. Are you sure that Lord Hampstead is strong? He was fickle-hearted. Can you be sure that Lord Hampstead will be constant amidst the charms of others whose manners will be more like his own than yours can be?"

"I think he would be constant," said Marion.

"Because you are ready to worship him who has condescended to step down from his high pedestal and worship you. Is it not so?"

"It may be that it is so," said Marion.

"Ah, yes, my child. It may be that it is so. And then, think of what may follow,—not only for him, but for you also; not only for you, but for him also. Broken hearts, crushed ambitions, hopes all dead, personal dislikes, and perhaps hatred."

"Not hatred; not hatred."

"I lived to be hated;—and why not another?" Then she was silent, and Marion rising from her seat kissed her, and went away to her home.

She had very much to think of. Though she had declared that she had almost expected this offer from her lover, still it could not be that the Quaker girl, the daughter of Zachary Fay, Messrs. Poyson and Littlebird's clerk, should not be astounded by having such an offer from such a suitor as Lord Hampstead. But in truth the glory of the thing was not very much to her. It was something, no doubt. It must be something to a girl to find that her own personal charms have sufficed to lure down from his lofty perch the topmost bird of them all. That Marion was open to some such weakness may be acknowledged of her. But of the coronet, of the diamonds, of the lofty title, and high seats, of the castle, and the parks, and well-arranged equipages, of the rich dresses, of the obsequious servants, and fawning world that would be gathered around her, it may be said that she thought not at all. She had in her short life seen one man who had pleased her ear and her eye, and had touched her heart; and that one man had instantly declared himself to be all her own. That made her bosom glow with some feeling of triumph!

That same evening she abruptly told the whole story to her father. "Father," she said, "Lord Hampstead was here to-day."

"Here, in this house?"

"Not in this house. But I met him at our friend's, whom I went to see, as is my custom almost daily."

"I am glad he came not here," said the Quaker.

"Why should you be glad?" To this the Quaker made no answer.

"His purpose was to have come here. It was to see me that he came."

"To see thee?"

"Father, the young lord has asked me to be his wife."

"Asked thee to be his wife!"

"Yes, indeed. Have you not often heard that young men may be infatuated? It has chanced that I have been the Cinderella for his eyes."

"But thou art no princess, child."

"And, therefore, am unfit to mate with this prince. I could not answer him at once, father. It was too sudden for me to find the words. And the place was hardly fitting. But I have found them now."

"What words, my child?"

"I will tell him with all respect and deference,—nay, I will tell him with some love, for I do love him,—that it will become him to look for his wife elsewhere."

"Marion," said the Quaker, who was somewhat moved by those things which had altogether failed with the girl herself; "Marion, must it be so?"

"Father, it must certainly be so."

"And yet thou lovest him?"

"Though I were dying for his love it must be so."

"Why, my child, why? As far as I saw the young man he is good and gracious, of great promise, and like to be true-hearted."

"Good, and gracious, and true-hearted! Oh, yes! And would you have it that I should bring such a one as that to sorrow,—perhaps to disgrace?"

"Why to sorrow? Why to disgrace? Wouldst thou be more likely to disgrace a husband than one of those painted Jezebels who know no worship but that of their faded beauty? Thou hast not answered him, Marion?"

"No, father. He is to come on Friday for my answer."

"Think of it yet again, my child. Three days are no time for considering a matter of such moment. Bid him leave you for ten days further."

"I am ready now," said Marion.

“And yet thou lovest him! That is not true to nature, Marion. I would not bid thee take a man’s hand because he is rich and great if thou couldst not give him thy heart in return. I would not have thee break any law of God or man for the glitter of gold or tinsel of rank. But the good things of this world, if they be come by honestly, are good. And the love of an honest man, if thou lovest him thyself in return, is not of the less worth because he stands high in wealth and in honour.”

“Shall I think nothing of him, father?”

“Yea, verily; it will be thy duty to think of him, almost exclusively of him,—when thou shalt be his wife.”

“Then, father, shall I never think of him?”

“Wilt thou pay no heed to my words, so as to crave from him further time for thought?”

“Not a moment. Father, you must not be angry with your child for this. My own feelings tell me true. My own heart, and my own heart alone, can dictate to me what I shall say to him. There are reasons—”

“What reasons?”

“There are reasons why my mother’s daughter should not marry this man.” Then there came a cloud across his brow, and he looked at her as though almost overcome by his anger. It seemed as though he strove to speak; but he sat for a while in silence. Then rising from his chair he left the room, and did not see her again that night.

This was on a Tuesday, on the Wednesday he did not speak to her on the subject. The Thursday was Christmas Day, and she went to church with Mrs. Roden. Nor did he on that day allude to the matter; but on the evening she made to him a little request. “To-morrow, father, is a holiday, is it not, in the City?”

“So they tell me. I hate such tom-fooleries. When

I was young a man might be allowed to earn his bread on all lawful days of the week. Now he is expected to spend the wages he cannot earn in drinking and show."

"Father, you must leave me here alone after our dinner. He will come for his answer."

"And you will give it?"

"Certainly, father, certainly. Do not question me further, for it must be as I told you." Then he left her as he had done before; but he did not urge her with any repetition of his request.

This was what occurred between Marion and her father; but on the Wednesday she had gone to Mrs. Roden as she had promised, and there explained her purpose more fully than she had before been able to do. "I have come, you see," she said, smiling. "I might have told you all at once, for I have changed nothing of my mind since first he spoke to me all so suddenly in the passage down-stairs."

"Are you so sure of yourself?"

"Quite sure;—quite sure. Do you think I would hurt him?"

"No, no. You would not, I know, do so willingly."

"And yet I must hurt him a little. I hope it will hurt him just a little." Mrs. Roden stared at her. "Oh, if I could make him understand it all! If I could bid him be a man, so that it should wound him only for a short time."

"What wound!"

"Did you think that I could take him, I, the daughter of a City clerk, to go and sit in his halls, and shame him before all the world, because he had thought fit to make me his wife? Never!"

"Marion, Marion!"

"Because he has made a mistake which has honoured

me, shall I mistake also, so as to dishonour him? Because he has not seen the distance, shall I be blind to it? He would have given himself up for me. Shall I not be able to make a sacrifice? To such a one as I am to sacrifice myself is all that I can do in the world."

"Is it such a sacrifice?"

"Could it be that I should not love him? When such a one comes, casting his pearls about, throwing sweet odours through the air, whispering words which are soft-sounding as music in the heavens, whispering them to me, casting them at me, turning on me the laughing glances of his young eyes, how could I help to love him? Do you remember when for a moment he knelt almost at my feet, and told me that I was his friend, and spoke to me of his hearth? Did you think that that did not move me?"

"So soon, my child;—so soon?"

"In a moment. Is it not so that it is done always?"

"Hearts are harder than that, Marion."

"Mine, I think, was so soft just then that the half of his sweet things would have ravished it from my bosom. But I feel for myself that there are two parts in me. Though the one can melt away, and pass altogether from my control, can gush like water that runs out and cannot be checked, the other has something in it of hard substance which can stand against blows, even from him."

"What is that something, Marion?"

"Nay, I cannot name it. I think it be another heart, of finer substance, or it may be it is woman's pride, which will suffer all things rather than hurt the one it loves. I know myself. No words from him,—no desire to see his joy, as he would be joyful, if I told him that I could give him all he asks,—no longing for all his love could do for me, shall move me one tittle. He shall tell

himself to his dying day that the Quaker girl, because she loved him, was true to his interests."

"My child;—my child!" said Mrs. Roden, taking Marion in her arms.

"Do you think that I do not know,—that I have forgotten? Was it nothing to me to see my—mother die, and her little ones? Do I not know that I am not, as others are, free to wed, not a lord like that, but even one of my own standing? Mrs. Roden, if I can live till my poor father shall have gone before me, so that he may not be left alone when the weakness of age shall have come upon him,—then,—then I shall be satisfied to follow them. No dream of loving had ever crossed my mind. He has come, and without my mind, the dream has been dreamed. I think that my lot will be happier so, than if I had passed away without any feeling such as that I have now. Perhaps he will not marry till I am gone."

"Would that hurt you so sorely?"

"It ought not. It shall not. It will be well that he should marry, and I will not wish to cause him evil. He will have gone away, and I shall hardly know of it. Perhaps they will not tell me." Mrs. Roden could only embrace her, sobbing, wiping her eyes with piteousness. "But I will not begrudge aught of the sacrifice," she continued. "There is nothing, I think, sweeter than to deny oneself all things for love. What are our lessons for but to teach us that? Shall I not do unto him as it would be well for me that some such girl should do for my sake if I were such as he?"

"Oh, Marion, you have got the better part."

"And yet,—and yet— —. I would that he should feel a little because he cannot have the toy that has pleased his eye. What was it that he saw in me, do

you think?" As she asked the question she cheered up wonderfully.

"The beauty of your brow and eyes,—the softness of your woman's voice."

"Nay, but I think it was my Quaker dress. His eye, perhaps, likes things all of a colour. I had, too, new gloves and a new frock when he saw me. How well I remember his coming,—how he would glance round at me till I hardly knew whether I was glad that he should observe me so much,—or offended at his persistence. I think that I was glad, though I told myself that he should not have glanced at me so often. And then, when he asked us to go down to his house I did long,—I did long,—to win father's consent to the journey. Had he not gone——"

"Do not think of it, Marion."

"That I will not promise;—but I will not talk of it. Now, dear Mrs. Roden, let all then be as though it had never been. I do not mean to mope, or to neglect my work, because a young lord has crossed my path and told me that he loves me. I must send him from me, and then I will be just as I have been always." Having made this promise she went away, leaving Mrs. Roden much more flurried by the interview than was she herself. When the Friday came, holiday as it was, the Quaker took himself off to the City after dinner, without another word as to his daughter's lover.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LORD HAMPSTEAD IS IMPATIENT.

HAMPSTEAD, when he was sent away from Paradise Row, and bade to wait till Friday for an answer, was disappointed, almost cross, and unreasonable in his feel-

ings towards Mrs. Roden. To Mrs. Roden altogether he attributed it that Marion had deferred her reply. Whether the delay thus enjoined told well or ill for his hopes he could not bring himself to determine. As he drove himself home his mind was swayed now in one direction and now in the other. Unless she loved him somewhat, unless she thought it possible that she should love him, she would hardly have asked for time to think of it all. And yet, had she really have loved him, why should she have asked for time? He had done for her all that a man could do for a girl, and if she loved him she should not have tormented him by foolish delays,—by coying her love!

It should be said on his behalf that he attributed to himself no preponderance of excellence, either on the score of his money or his rank. He was able so to honour the girl as to think of her that such things would go for nothing with her. It was not that he had put his coronet at her feet, but his heart. It was of that he thought when he reminded himself of all that he had done for her, and told himself angrily that she should not have tormented him. He was as arrogant and impatient of disappointment as any young lord of them all,—but it was not, however, because he was a lord that he thought that Marion's heart was due to him.

“I have been over to Holloway,” he said to his sister, almost as soon as he had returned.

Out of the full heart the mouth speaks. “Have you seen George?” asked Lady Frances.

“No; I did not get to see him. He, of course, would be at his office during the day. I went about my own business.”

“You need not be so savage with me, John. What was your own business at Holloway?”

"I went to ask Marion Fay to be my wife."

"You did?"

"Yes; I did. Why should I not? It seems the fashion for us all now to marry just those we fancy best."

"And why not? Have I gainsaid you? If this Quaker's daughter be good and honest, and fair to look at——"

"That she is fair to look at I can say certainly. That she is good I believe thoroughly. That she is honest, at any rate to me, I cannot say as yet."

"Not honest?"

"She will not steal or pick a pocket, if you mean that."

"What is it, John? Why do you speak of her in this way?"

"Because I have chosen to tell you. Having made up my mind to do this thing, I would not keep it secret as though I were ashamed of it. How can I say that she is honest till she has answered me honestly?"

"What answer has she made you?" she asked.

"None;—as yet! She has told me to come again another day."

"I like her better for that."

"Why should you like her better? Just because you're a woman, and think that shilly-shallying and pretending not to know your own mind, and keeping a fellow in suspense, is becoming. I am not going to change my mind about Marion; but I do think that mock hesitation is unnecessary, and in some degree dishonest."

"Must it necessarily be mock hesitation? Ought she not to be sure of herself that she can love you?"

"Certainly; or that she should not love me. I am not such a puppy as to suppose that she is to throw herself into my arms just because I ask her. But I think that she must have known something of herself so as to have been able to tell me either to hope or not to hope.

She was as calm as a Minister in the House of Commons answering a question; and she told me to wait till Friday just as those fellows do when they have to find out from the clerks in the office what it is they ought to say."

"You will go again on Friday?" she asked.

"Of course I must. It is not likely that she should come to me. And then if she says that she'd rather not, I must come home once more with my tail between my legs."

"I do not think she will say that."

"How can you tell?"

"It is the nature of a girl, I think," said Lady Frances, "to doubt a little when she thinks that she can love, but not to doubt at all when she feels that she cannot. She may be persuaded afterwards to change her mind, but at first she is certain enough."

"I call that shilly-shally."

"Not at all. The girl I'm speaking of is honest throughout. And Miss Fay will have been honest should she accept you now. It is not often that such a one as you, John, can ask a girl in vain."

"That is mean," he said, angrily. "That is imputing falseness, and greed, and dishonour to the girl I love. If she has liked some fellow clerk in her father's office better than she likes me, shall she accept me merely because I am my father's son?"

"It was not that of which I was thinking. A man may have personal gifts which will certainly prevail with a girl young and unsullied by the world, as I suppose is your Marion Fay."

"Bosh," he said, laughing. "As far as personal gifts are concerned, one fellow is pretty nearly the same as another. A girl has to be good-looking. A man has

got to have something to buy bread and cheese with. After that it is all a mere matter of liking and disliking—unless, indeed, people are dishonest, which they very often are.”

Up to this period of his life Lord Hampstead had never met any girl whom he had thought it desirable to make his wife. It was now two years since the present Marchioness had endeavoured to arrange an alliance between him and her own niece, Lady Amaldina Hauteville. This, though but two years had passed since, seemed to him to have occurred at a distant period of his life. Very much had occurred to him during those two years. His political creed had been strengthened by the convictions of others, especially by those of George Roden, till it had included those advanced opinions which have been described. He had annoyed, and then dismayed, his father by his continued refusal to go into Parliament. He had taken to himself ways of living of his own, which gave to him the manners and appearance of more advanced age. At that period, two years since, his stepmother still conceived high hopes of him, even though he would occasionally utter in her presence opinions which seemed to be terrible. He was then not of age, and there would be time enough for a woman of her tact and intellect to cure all those follies. The best way of curing them, she thought, would be by arranging a marriage between the heir to the Marquisate and the daughter of so distinguished a conservative Peer as her brother-in-law, Lord Persiflage. Having this high object in view, she opened the matter with diplomatic caution to her sister. Lady Persiflage had at that moment begun to regard Lord Llwdytlw as a possible son-in-law, but was alive to the fact that Lord Hampstead possessed some superior advantages. It was possible that her girl

should really love such a one as Lord Hampstead,—hardly possible that there should be anything romantic in a marriage with the heir of the Duke of Merioneth. As far as wealth and rank went there was enough in both competitors. She whispered therefore to her girl the name of the younger aspirant,—aspirant as he might be hoped to be,—and the girl was not opposed to the idea. Only let there be no falling to the ground between two stools; no starving for want of fodder between two bundles of hay! Lord Llwdytlw had already begun to give symptoms. No doubt he was bald; no doubt he was pre-occupied with Parliament and the county. There was no doubt that his wife would have to encounter that touch of ridicule which a young girl incurs when she marries a man altogether removed beyond the world of romance. But dukes are scarce, and the man of business was known to be a man of high honour. There would be no gambling, no difficulties, no possible question of a want of money. And then his politics were the grandest known in England,—those of an old Tory willing always to work for his party without desiring any of those rewards which the “party” wishes to divide among as select a number as possible. What Lord Hampstead might turn out to be, there was as yet no knowing. He had already declared himself to be a Radical. He was fond of hunting, and it was quite on the cards that he should take to Newmarket. Then, too, his father might live for five-and-twenty years, whereas the Duke of Merioneth was already nearly eighty. But Hampstead was as beautiful as a young Phœbus, and the pair would instantly become famous if only from their good looks alone. The chance was given to Lady Amaldina, but only given on the understanding that she must make very quick work of her time.

Hampstead was coaxed down to Castle Hautboy for a month in September, with an idea that the young lovers might be as romantic as they pleased among the Lakes. Some little romance there was; but at the end of the first week Amaldina wisely told her mother that the thing wouldn't do. She would always be glad to regard Lord Hampstead as a cousin, but as to anything else, there must be an end of it. "I shall some day give up my title and abandon the property to Freddy. I shall then go to the United States, and do the best I can there to earn my own bread." This little speech, made by the proposed lover to the girl he was expected to marry, opened Lady Amaldina's eyes to the danger of her situation. Lord Llwdytlw was induced to spend two days in the following month at Castle Hautboy, and then the arrangements for the Welsh alliance were completed.

From that time forth a feeling of ill-will on the part of Lady Kingsbury towards her stepson had grown and become strong from month to month. She had not at first conceived any idea that her Lord Frederic ought to come to the throne. That had come gradually when she perceived, or thought that she perceived, that Hampstead would hardly make a marriage properly aristocratic. Hitherto no tidings of any proposed marriage had reached her ears. She lived at last in daily fear, as any marriage would be the almost sure forerunner of a little Lord Highgate. If something might happen,—something which she had taught herself to regard as beneficent and fitting rather than fatal,—something which might ensure to her little Lord Frederic those prospects which he had almost a right to expect, then in spite of all her sufferings Heaven would have done something for her for which she might be thankful.

"What will her ladyship say when she hears of my maid Marion?" said Hampstead to his sister on the Christmas Day before his further visit to Holloway.

"Will it matter much?" asked Lady Frances.

"I think my feelings towards her are softer than yours. She is silly, arrogant, harsh, and insolent to my father, and altogether unprincipled in her expectations and ambitions."

"What a character you give her," said his sister.

"But nevertheless I feel for her to such an extent that I almost think I ought to abolish myself."

"I cannot say that I feel for her."

"It is all for her son that she wants it; and I agree with her in thinking that Freddy will be better fitted than I am for the position in question. I am determined to marry Marion if I can get her; but all the Traffords, unless it be yourself, will be broken-hearted at such a marriage. If once I have a son of my own the matter will be hopeless. If I were to call myself Snooks, and refused to take a shilling from the property, I should do them no good. Marion's boy would be just as much in their way as I am."

"What a way of looking at it!"

"How my stepmother will hate her! A Quaker's daughter! A clerk at Pogson and Littlebird's! Living at Paradise Row! Can't you see her! Is it not hard upon her that we should both go to Paradise Row?" Lady Frances could not keep herself from laughing. "You can't do her any permanent injury, because you are only a girl; but I think she will poison me. It will end in her getting Mr. Greenwood to give me some broth."

"John, you are too terrible."

"If I could be on the jury afterwards, I would certainly acquit them both on the ground of extreme provocation."

Early on the following morning he was in a fidget, having fixed no hour for his visit to Holloway. It was not likely that she should be out or engaged, but he determined not to go till after lunch. All employment was out of the question, and he was rather a trouble to his sister; but in the course of the morning there came a letter which did for a while occupy his thoughts. The envelope was addressed in a hand he did not know, and was absurdly addressed to the

“RIGHT HONOURABLE,

“THE LORD HAMPSTEAD.”

“I wonder who this ass is,” said he, tearing it open. The ass was Samuel Crocker, and the letter was as follows;—

“*Heathcote Street,*

“*Mecklenburg Square,*

“*Christmas Day, 18—.*”

“MY DEAR LORD HAMPSTEAD.

“I hope I may be excused for addressing your lordship in this familiar manner. I take occasion of this happy day to write to your lordship on a message of peace. Since I had the honour of meeting you at your noble uncle’s mansion, Castle Hautboy, I have considered it one of the greatest delights of my life to be able to boast of your acquaintance. You will not, I am sure, forget that we have been fellow sportsmen, and that we rode together on that celebrated run when we killed our fox in the field just over Airey Force. I shall never forget the occasion, or how well your lordship went over our rough country. To my mind there is no bond of union so strong as that of sport.

‘Up strikes little Davy with his musical horn.’

“I am sure you will remember that, my lord, and the beautiful song to which it belongs. I remember, too,

how, as we were riding home after the run, your lordship was talking all the way about our mutual friend, George Roden.

"He is a man for whom I have a most sincere regard, both as being an excellent public servant, and as a friend of your lordship's. It is quite a pleasure to see the way in which he devotes himself to the service,—as I do also. When you have taken the Queen's shilling you ought to earn it. Those are my principles, my lord. We have a couple of young fellows there whose only object it is to get through the day and eat their lunches. I always tell them that official hours ain't their own. I suppose they'll understand me some day.

"But as I was saying to your lordship about George Roden, there has something come up which I don't quite understand, which seems to have turned him against me. Nothing has ever given me so much pleasure as when I heard of his prospects as to a certain matter—which your lordship will know what I mean. Nothing could be more flattering than the way I've wished him joy ever so many times. So I do also your lordship and her ladyship, because he is a most respectable young man, though his station in life isn't so high as some people's. But a clerk in H. M. S. has always been taken for a gentleman which I am proud to think is my position as well as his.

"But, as I was saying to your lordship, something seems to have gone against him as to our mutual friendship. He sits there opposite and won't speak a word to me, except just to answer a question, and that hardly civil. He is as sweet as sugar to those fellows who ain't at the same desk with him as I am,—or I should think it was his future prospects were making him upsetting. Couldn't your lordship do something to make things up

between us again,—especially on this festive occasion? I'm sure your lordship will remember how pleasant we were together at Castle Hautboy, and at the hunt, and especially as we were riding home together on that day. I did take the liberty of calling at Hendon Hall, when her ladyship was kind enough to see me. Of course there was a delicacy in speaking to her ladyship about Mr. Roden, which nobody could understand better than I do; but I think she made me something of a promise that she would say a word when a proper time might come.

“It could only have been a joke of mine; and I do joke sometimes, as your lordship may have observed. But I shouldn't think Roden would be the man to be mortally offended by anything of that sort. Anyway, I will leave the matter in your lordship's hands, merely remarking that,—as your lordship may remember,—‘Blessed are the peace-makers, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.’

“I have the honour to be,

“My dear Lord Hampstead,

“Your lordship's most obedient,

“Very humble servant,

“SAMUEL CROCKER.”

Fretful and impatient as he was on that morning, it was impossible for Hampstead not to laugh at this letter. He showed it to his sister, who, in spite of her annoyance, was constrained to laugh also. “I shall tell George to take him to his bosom at once,” said he.

“Why should George be bothered with him?”

“Because George can't help himself. They sit at the same desk together, as Crocker has not forgotten to tell me a dozen times. When a man perseveres in this way, and is thick-skinned enough to bear all rebuffs, there is nothing he will not accomplish. I have no doubt he

will be riding my horses in Leicestershire before the season is over." An answer, however, was written to him in the following words;—

"DEAR MR. CROCKER,

"I am afraid I cannot interfere with Mr. Roden, who doesn't like to be dictated to in such matters.

"Yours truly,

"HAMPSTEAD."

"There," said he; "I do not think he can take that letter as a mark of friendship."

In this way the morning was passed till the time came for the start to Holloway. Lady Frances, standing at the hall door as he got into his trap, saw that the fashion of his face was unusually serious.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE QUAKER'S ELOQUENCE.

WHEN the Friday morning came in Paradise Row both father and daughter, at No. 17, were full of thought as they came down to breakfast. To each of them it was a day laden with importance. The father's mind had been full of the matter ever since the news had been told to him. He had received Marion's positive assurance that such a marriage was altogether impossible with something of impatience till she had used that argument as to her own health, which was so powerful with her. On hearing that he had said nothing, but had gone away. Nor had he spoken a word on the subject

since. But his mind had been full of it. He had lost his wife,—and all his little ones, as she had said; but he had declared to himself with strong confidence that this child was to be spared to him. He was a man whose confidence was unbounded in things as to which he had resolved. It was as though he had determined, in spite of Fate, in spite of God, that his Marion should live. And she had grown up under his eyes, if not robust, by no means a weak creature. She did her work about the house, and never complained. In his eyes she was very beautiful; but he saw nothing in her colour which was not to him a sign of health. He told himself that it was nothing that she, having seen so many die in her own family, should condemn herself; but for himself he repudiated the idea, and declared to himself that she should not become an early victim. So thinking, he exercised his mind constantly during those few days in considering whether there was any adequate cause for the refusal which Marion had determined to give this man.

He, in truth, was terribly anxious that this grand stroke of fortune should be acknowledged and accepted. He wanted nothing from the young lord himself,—except, perhaps, that he might be the young lord's father-in-law. But he did want it all, long for it all, pant for it all, on behalf of his girl. If all these good things came in his girl's way because of her beauty, her grace, and her merit, why should they not be accepted? Others not only accepted these things for their daughters, but hunted for them, cheated for them, did all mean things in searching for them,—and had their tricks and their lies regarded by the world quite as a matter of course,—because it was natural that parents should be anxious

for their children. He had not hunted. He had not cheated. The thing had come in his girl's way. The man had found her to be the most lovely, the most attractive, the most loveable among all whom he had seen. And was this glory to be thrown away because she had filled her mind with false fears? Though she were to die, must not the man take his chance with her, as do other husbands in marrying other wives?

He had been thinking of this, and of nothing but this, during the days which had intervened since Lord Hampstead had been in Paradise Row. He had not said a word to his daughter,—had indeed not dared to say a word to her, so abhorrent to him was the idea of discussing with her the probabilities of her own living or dying. And he was doubtful, too, whether any words coming from him at the present might not strengthen her in her resolution. If the man really loved her he might prevail. His words would be stronger to overcome her than any that could be spoken by her father. And then, too, if he really loved her, the one repulse would not send him back for ever. It might, perhaps, be better that any arguments from her father should be postponed till she should have heard her lover's arguments. But his mind was so filled with the whole matter that he could not bring himself to assure himself certainly that his decision was the best. Though he was one who rarely needed counsel from others, on this occasion he did need it, and now it was his purpose to ask counsel of Mrs. Roden before the moment should have come which might be fatal to his hopes.

As this was the day immediately following Christmas, there was no business for him in the City. In order that the weary holiday might be quicker consumed, they

breakfasted at No. 17 an hour later than was usual. After breakfast he got through the morning as well as he could with his newspaper, and some record of stocks and prices which he had brought with him from the City. So he remained, fretful, doing nothing, pretending to read, but with his mind fixed upon the one subject, till it was twelve o'clock, at which hour he had determined to make his visit. At half-past one they were to dine, each of them having calculated, without, however, a word having been spoken, that Lord Hampstead would certainly not come till the ceremony of dinner would be over. Though the matter was so vitally important to both of them, not a word concerning it was spoken.

At twelve o'clock he took up his hat, and walked out. "You will be back punctually for dinner, father?" she asked. He made his promise simply by nodding his head, and then left the room. Five minutes afterwards he was closeted with Mrs. Roden in her drawing-room. Having conceived the difficulty of leading up to the subject gradually, he broke into it at once. "Marion has told thee that this young man will be here to-day?" She simply assented. "Hast thou advised her as to what she should say?"

"She has not seemed to want advice."

"How should a girl not want advice in so great a matter?"

"How, indeed? But yet she has needed none."

"Has she told thee," he asked, "what it is in her mind to do?"

"I think so."

"Has she said that she would refuse the man?"

"Yes; that certainly was her purpose."

"And given the reasons?" he said, almost trembling as he asked the question.

"Yes, she gave her reasons."

"And didst thou agree with her?" Before she could reply to this Mrs. Roden felt herself compelled to pause. When she thought of that one strongest reason, fully as she agreed with it, she was unable to tell the father of the girl that she did so. She sat looking at him, wanting words with which she might express her full concurrence with Marion without plunging a dagger into the other's heart. "Then thou didst agree with her?" There was something terrible in the intensity and slowness of the words as he repeated the question.

"On the whole I did," she said. "I think that unequal marriages are rarely happy."

"That was all?" he asked. Then when she was again silent, he made the demand which was so important to him. "Did she say aught of her health in discussing all this with thee?"

"She did, Mr. Fay."

"And thou?"

"It was a subject, my friend, on which I could not speak to her. All that was said came from her. Her mind was so fully made up, as I have said before, no advice from me could avail anything. With some people it is easy to see that whether you agree with them or differ from them it is impossible to turn them."

"But to me thou canst say whether thou hast agreed with her. Yes; I know well that the subject is one difficult to talk of in a father's hearing. But there are things which should be talked of, though the heart should break." After another pause he continued; "Is there, thinkest thou, sufficient cause in the girl's health

to bid her sever herself from these delights of life and customary habits which the Lord has intended for His creatures?" At every separate question he paused, but when she was silent he went on with other questions. "Is there that in her looks, is there that in her present condition of life, which make it needful for thee, her friend, or for me, her father, to treat her as though she were already condemned by the hand of the Lord to an early grave?" Then, again, looking almost fiercely into her face, he went on with his examination, "That is what thou art doing."

"Not I;—not I."

"Yes, thou, my friend; thou, with all thy woman's softness in thy heart! It is what I shall do, unless I bring myself to tell her that her fears are vain. To me she has said that that is her reason. It is not that she cannot love the man. Has she not said as much to thee?"

"Yes; truly."

"And art thou not assenting to it unless thou tell'st her that her fancies are not only vain, but wrong? Though thou hast not spoken the word, has not thy silence assented as fully as words could do? Answer me at any rate to that."

"It is so," she said.

"Is it then necessary to condemn her? Art thou justified in thine own thoughts in bidding her regard herself as one doomed?" Again there was a pause. What was she to say? "Thou art aware that in our poor household she does all that the strictest economy would demand from an active mother of a family? She is never idle. If she suffers I do not see it. She takes her food, if not with strong appetite, yet regularly. She

is upright, and walks with no languor. No doctor comes near her. If like others she requires change of air and scene, what can give her such chance as this marriage? Hast thou not heard that for girls of feeble health marriage itself will strengthen them? Is she such that thou as her friend must bid her know that she must perish like a blighted flower? Must I bid her to hem and stitch her own winding-sheet? It comes to that if no word be said to her to turn her from this belief. She has seen them all die,—one after another,—one after another, till the idea of death, of death for herself as well as for them, has gotten hold of her. And yet it will be the case that one in a family shall escape. I have asked among those who know, and I have found that it is so. The Lord does not strike them all, always. But if she thinks that she is stricken then she will fall. If she goes forth to meet Death on the path, Death will come half way to encounter her. Dost thou believe of me that it is because the man is a noble lord that I desire this marriage?"

"Oh no, Mr. Fay."

"He will take my child away from me. She will then be but little to me. What want I with lords, who for the few days of active life that are left to me would not change my City stool for any seat that any lord can give me? But I shall know that she has had her chance in the world, and has not been unnecessarily doomed—to an early grave!"

"What would you have me do?"

"Go to her, and tell her that she should look forward, with trust in God, to such a state of health as He may vouchsafe to give her. Her thoughts are mostly with her God. Bid her not shorten His mercies. Bid her

not to tell herself that she can examine His purposes. Bid her do in this as her nature bids her, and, if she can love this man, give herself into his arms and leave the rest to the Lord."

"But he will be there at once."

"If he be there, what harm? Thou canst go when he comes to the door. I shall go to her now, and we shall dine together, and then at once I will leave her. When you see me pass the window then thou canst take thine occasion." So saying, without waiting for a promise, he left her and went back to his own house.

And Marion's heart had been full of many thoughts that morning,—some of them so trifling in their object, that she herself would wonder at herself because that they should occupy her. How should she be dressed to receive her lover? In what words first should she speak to him,—and in what sort? Should she let any sign of love escape from her? Her resolution as to her great purpose was so fixed that there was no need for further thought on that matter. It was on the little things that she was intent. How far might she indulge herself in allowing some tenderness to escape her? How best might she save him from any great pain, and yet show him that she was proud that he had loved her? In what dress she might receive him, in that would she sit at table with her father. It was Christmas time, and the occasion would justify whatever of feminine smartness her wardrobe possessed. As she brought out from its recess the rich silk frock, still all but new, in which he had first seen her, she told herself that she would probably have worn it for her father's sake, had no lover been coming. On the day before, the Christmas Day, she had worn it at church. And the shoes with the

pretty buckles, and the sober but yet handsome morsel of lace which was made for her throat, — and which she had not been ashamed to wear at that memorable dinner, — they were all brought out. It was Christmas, and her father's presence would surely have justified them all! And would she not wish to leave in her lover's eyes the memory of whatever prettiness she might have possessed? They were all produced. But when the moment came for arraying herself they were all restored to their homes. She would be the simple Quaker girl as she was to be found there on Monday, on Tuesday, and on Wednesday. It would be better that he should know how little there was for him to lose.

Zachary Fay ate his dinner almost without a word. She, though she smiled on him and tried to look contented, found it almost impossible to speak. She uttered some little phrases which she intended to be peculiar to the period of the year; but she felt that her father's mind was intent on what was coming, and he discontinued her efforts. She found it hardly possible to guess at the frame of his mind, so silent had he been since first he had yielded to her when she assured him of her purpose. But she had assured him, and he could not doubt her purpose. If he were unhappy for the moment it was needful that he should be unhappy. There could be no change, and therefore it was well that he should be silent. He had hardly swallowed his dinner when he rose from his chair, and, bringing in his hat from the passage, spoke a word to her before he departed. "I am going into the City, Marion," he said. "I know it is well that I should be absent this afternoon. I shall return to tea. God bless thee, my child."

Marion, rising from her chair, kissed his lips and

cheeks, and accompanied him to the door. "It will be all well, my father," she said; "it will be all well, and your child will be happy."

About half-an-hour afterwards there came a knock at the door, and Marion for a moment thought that her lover was already there. But it was Mrs. Roden who came up to her in the drawing-room. "Am I in the way, Marion?" she asked. "I will be gone in a minute; but perhaps I can say a word first."

"Why should you be in the way?"

"He is coming."

"Yes, I suppose so. He said that he would come. But what if he come? You and he are old friends."

"I would not be here to interrupt him. I will escape when we hear the knock. Oh, Marion!"

"What is it, Mrs. Roden? You are sad, and something troubles you?"

"Yes, indeed. There is something which troubles me sorely. This lover of yours?"

"It is fixed, dear friend; fixed as fate. It does not trouble me. It shall not trouble me. Why should it be a trouble? Suppose I had never seen him!"

"But you have seen him, my child."

"Yes, indeed; and whether that be for good or evil, either to him or to me, it must be accepted. Nothing now can alter that. But I think, indeed, that it is a blessing. It will be something to me to remember that such a one as he has loved me. And for him——"

"I would speak now of you, Marion."

"I am contented."

"It may be, Marion, that in this concerning your health you should be altogether wrong."

"How wrong?"

"What right have you or I to say that the Lord has determined to shorten your days."

"Who has said so?"

"It is on that theory that you are acting."

"No;—not on that; not on that alone. Were I as strong as are other girls,—as the very strongest,—I would do the same. Has my father been with you?"

"Yes, he has."

"My poor father! But it is of no avail. It would be wrong, and I will not do it. If I am to die, I must die. If I am to live, let me live. I shall not die certainly because I have resolved to send this fine lover away. However weak Marion Fay may be, she is strong enough not to pine for that."

"If there be no need?"

"No need? What was it you said of unequal marriages? What was the story that you told me of your own? If I love this man, of whom am I to think the most? Could it be possible that I should be to him what a wife ought to be to her husband? Could I stand nobly on his hearth-rug, and make his great guests welcome? Should I be such a one that every day he should bless the kind fortune which had given him such a woman to help him to rule his house? How could I go from the littleness of these chambers to walk through his halls without showing that I knew myself to be an intruder? And yet I should be so proud that I should resent the looks of all who told me by their faces that I was so. He has done wrong in allowing himself to love me. He has done wrong in yielding to his passion, and telling me of his love. I will be wiser and nobler than he. If the Lord will help me, if my Saviour will be on

my side, I will not do wrong. I did not think that you, Mrs. Roden, would turn against me."

"Turn against thee, Marion? I to turn against thee!"

"You should strengthen me."

"It seems to me that you want no strength from others. It is for your poor father that I would say a word."

"I would not have father believe that my health has aught to do with it. You know,—you know what right I have to think that I am fit to marry and to hope to be the mother of children. It needs not that he should know. Let it suffice for him to be told that I am not equal to this greatness. A word escaped me in speaking to him, and I repent myself that I so spoke to him. But tell him,—and tell him truly,—that were my days fixed here for the next fifty years, were I sure of the rudest health, I would not carry my birth, my manners, my habits into that young lord's house. How long would it be, Mrs. Roden, before he saw some little trick that would displease him? Some word would be wrongly spoken, some garment would be ill-folded, some awkward movement would tell the tale,—and then he would feel that he had done wrong to marry the Quaker's daughter. All the virtues under the sun cannot bolster up love so as to stand the battery of one touch of disgust. Tell my father that, and tell him that I have done well. Then you can tell him also, that, if God shall so choose it, I shall live a strong old maid for many years, to think night and day of his goodness to me,—of his great love."

Mrs. Roden, as she had come across from her own house, had known that her mission would fail. To persuade another against one's own belief is difficult in

any case, but to persuade Marion Fay on such a matter as this was a task beyond the eloquence of man or woman. She had made up her mind that she must fail utterly when the knock came at the door. She took the girl in her arms and kissed her without further attempt. She would not even bid her think of it once again, as might have been so easy at parting. "I will go into your room while he passes," she said. As she did so Lord Hampstead's voice was heard at the door.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARION'S OBSTINACY.

LORD HAMPSTEAD drove himself very fast from Hendon Hall to the "Duchess of Edinburgh" at Holloway, and then, jumping out of his trap, left it without saying a word to his servant, and walked quickly up Paradise Row till he came to No. 17. There, without pausing a moment, he knocked sharply at the door. Going on such a business as this, he did not care who saw him. There was an idea present to him that he would be doing honour to Marion Fay if he made it known to all the world of Holloway that he had come there to ask her to be his wife. It was this feeling which had made him declare his purpose to his sister, and which restrained him from any concealment as to his going and coming.

Marion was standing alone in the middle of the room, with her two hands clasped together, but with a smile on her face. She had considered much as to this moment, determining even the very words that she would use. The words probably were forgotten, but the pur-

pose was all there. He had resolved upon nothing, had considered nothing,—except that she should be made to understand that, because of his exceeding love, he required her to come to him as his wife. “Marion,” he said, “Marion, you know why I am here!” And he advanced to her, as though he would at once have taken her in his arms.

“Yes, my lord, I know.”

“You know that I love you. I think, surely, that never love was stronger than mine. If you can love me say but the one word, and you will make me absolutely happy. To have you for my wife is all that the world can give me now. Why do you go from me? Is it to tell me that you cannot love me, Marion? Do not say that, or I think my heart will break.”

She could not say that, but as he paused for her answer it was necessary that she should say something. And the first word spoken must tell the whole truth, even though it might be that the word must be repeated often before he could be got to believe that it was an earnest word. “My lord,” she began.

“Oh, I do hate that form of address. My name is John. Because of certain conventional arrangements the outside people call me Lord Hampstead.”

“It is because I can be to you no more than one of the outside people that I call you—my lord.”

“Marion!”

“Only one of the outside people;—no more, though my gratitude to you, my appreciation, my friendship for you may be ever so strong. My father’s daughter must be just one of the outside people to Lord Hampstead,—and no more.”

“Why so? Why do you say it? Why do you torment

me? Why do you banish me at once, and tell me that I must go home a wretched, miserable man? Why?—why?—why?

“Because, my lord——”

“I can give a reason,—a good reason,—a reason which I cannot oppose, though it must be fatal to me unless I can remove it; a reason to which I must succumb if necessary, but to which, Marion, I will not succumb at once. If you say that you cannot love me that will be a reason.”

If it were necessary that she should tell him a lie, she must do so. It would have been pleasant if she could have made him understand that she would be content to love him on condition that he would be content to leave her. That she should continue to love him, and that he should cease to love her,—unless, perhaps, just a little,—that had been a scheme for the future which had recommended itself to her. There should be a something left which should give a romance to her life, but which should leave him free in all things. It had been a dream, in which she had much trusted, but which, while she listened to the violence of his words, she acknowledged to herself to be almost impossible. She must tell the lie;—but at the moment it seemed to her that there might be a middle course. “I dare not love you,” she said.

“Dare not love me, Marion? Who hinders you? Who tells you that you may not? Is it your father?”

“No, my lord, no.”

“It is Mrs. Roden.”

“No, my lord. This is a matter in which I could obey no friend, no father. I have had to ask myself,

and I have told myself that I do not dare to love above my station in life."

"I am to have that bugbear again between me and my happiness?"

"Between that and your immediate wishes;—yes. Is it not so in all things? If I,—even I,—had set my heart upon some one below me, would not you, as my friend, have bade me conquer the feeling?"

"I have set my heart on one whom in the things of the world I regard as my equal,—in all other things as infinitely my superior."

"The compliment is very sweet to me, but I have trained myself to resist sweetness. It may not be, Lord Hampstead. It may not be. You do not know as yet how obstinate such a girl as I may become when she has to think of another's welfare,—and a little, perhaps, of her own."

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes."

"That I should not love you?"

"Even of that. When you should come to see in me that which is not lovable you would cease to love me. You would be good to me because your nature is good; kind to me because your nature is kind. You would not ill-treat me because you are gentle, noble, and forgiving. But that would not suffice for me. I should see it in your eye, despite yourself,—and hear it in your voice, even though you tried to hide it by occasional softness. I should eat my own heart when I am to see that you despised your Quaker wife."

"All that is nonsense, Marion."

"My lord!"

"Say the word at once if it has to be said,—so that

I may know what it is that I have to contend with. For you my heart is so full of love that it seems to be impossible that I should live without you. If there could be any sympathy I should at once be happy. If there be none, say so."

"There is none."

"No spark of sympathy in you for me,—for one who loves you so truly?" When the question was put to her in that guise she could not quite tell so monstrous a lie as would be needed for an answer fit for her purpose. "This is a matter, Marion, in which a man has a right to demand an answer,—to demand a true answer."

"Lord Hampstead, it may be that you should perplex me sorely. It may be that you should drive me away from you, and beg you never to trouble me any further. It may be that you should force me to remain dumb before you, because that I cannot reply to you in proper words. But you will never alter my purpose. If you think well of Marion Fay, take her word when she gives it you. I can never become your lordship's wife."

"Never?"

"Never! Certainly never!"

"Have you told me why:—all the reason why?"

"I have told you enough, Lord Hampstead."

"By heavens, no! You have not answered me the one question that I have asked you. You have not given me the only reason which I would take,—even for a while. Can you love me, Marion?"

"If you loved me you would spare me," she said. Then feeling that such words utterly betrayed her, she recovered herself, and went to work with what best eloquence was at her command to cheat him out of the direct answer which he required. "I think," she said,

"you do not understand the workings of a girl's heart in such a matter. She does not dare to ask herself about her love, when she knows that loving would avail her nothing. For what purpose should I inquire into myself when the object of such inquiry has already been obtained? Why should I trouble myself to know whether this thing would be a gain to me or not, when I am well aware that I can never have the gain?"

"Marion, I think you love me." She looked at him and tried to smile,—tried to utter some half-joking word; and then as she felt that she could no longer repress her tears, she turned her face from him, and made no attempt at a reply. "Marion," he said again, "I think that you love me."

"If you loved me, my lord, you would not torture me." She had seated herself now on the sofa, turning her face away from him over her shoulder so that she might in some degree hide her tears. He sat himself at her side, and for a moment or two got possession of her hand.

"Marion," he said, pleading his case with all the strength of words which was at his command, "you know, do you not, that no moment of life can be of more importance to me than this?"

"Is it so, my lord?"

"None can be so important. I am striving to get her for my companion in life, who to me is the sweetest of all human beings. To touch you as I do now is a joy to me, even though you have made my heart so sad." At the moment she struggled to get her hand away from him, but the struggle was not at first successful. "You answer me with arguments which are to me of no avail at all. They are, to my thinking,

simply a repetition of prejudices to which I have been all my life opposed. You will not be angry because I say so?"

"Oh, no, my lord," she said; "not angry. I am not angry, but indeed you must not hold me." With that she extricated her hand, which he allowed to pass from his grasp as he continued his address to her.

"As to all that, I have my opinion and you have yours. Can it be right that you should hold to your own and sacrifice me who have thought so much of what it is I want myself,—if in truth you love me? Let your opinion stand against mine, and neutralize it. Let mine stand against yours, and in that we shall be equal. Then after that let love be lord of all. If you love me, Marion, I think that I have a right to demand that you shall be my wife."

There was something in this which she did not know how to answer;—but she did know, she was quite sure, that no word of his, no tenderness either on his part or on her own, would induce her to yield an inch. It was her duty to sacrifice herself for him,—for reasons which were quite apparent to herself,—and she would do it. The fortress of her inner purpose was safe, although he had succeeded in breaking down the bulwark by which it had been her purpose to guard it. He had claimed her love, and she had not been strong enough to deny the claim. Let the bulwark go. She was bad at lying. Let her lie as she might, he had wit enough to see through it. She would not take the trouble to deny her love should he persist in saying that it had been accorded to him. But surely she might succeed at last in making him understand that, whether she loved him

or no, she would not marry him. "I certainly shall never be your wife," she said.

"And that is all?"

"What more, my lord?"

"You can let me go, and never wish me to return?"

"I can, my lord. Your return would only be a trouble to you, and a pain to me. Another time do not turn your eyes too often on a young woman because her face may chance to please you. It is well that you should marry. Go and seek a wife, with judgment, among your own people. When you have done that, then you may return and tell Marion Fay that you have done well by following her advice."

"I will come again, and again, and again, and I will tell Marion Fay that her counsels are unnatural and impossible. I will teach her to know that the man who loves her can seek no other wife;—that no other mode of living is possible to him than one in which he and Marion Fay shall be joined together. I think I shall persuade her at last that such is the case. I think she will come to know that all her cold prudence and worldly would-be wisdom can be of no avail to separate those who love each other. I think that when she finds that her lover so loves her that he cannot live without her, she will abandon those fears as to his future fickleness, and trust herself to one of whose truth she will have assured herself." Then he took her hand, and kneeling at her knee, he kissed it before she was powerful enough to withdraw it. And so he left her, without another word, and mounting on his vehicle, drove himself home without having exchanged a single word at Holloway with any one save Marion Fay.

She, when she was left alone, threw herself at full

length on the sofa and burst into an ecstasy of tears. Trust herself to him! Yes, indeed. She would trust herself to him entirely, only in order that she might have the joy, for one hour, of confessing her love to him openly, let the consequences to herself afterwards be what they might! As to that future injury to her pride of which she had spoken both to her father and also to her friend,—of which she had said so much to herself in discussing this matter with her own heart—as to that he had convinced her. It did not become her in any way to think of herself in this matter. He certainly would be able to twist her as he would if she could stand upon no surer rock than her fears for her own happiness. One kiss from him would be payment for it all. But all his love, all his sweetness, all his truth, all his eloquence should avail nothing with her towards overcoming that spirit of self-sacrifice by which she was dominated. Though he should extort from her all her secret, that would be her strength. Though she should have to tell him of her failing health,—her certainly failing health,—though even that should be necessary, she certainly would not be won from her purpose. It might be sweet, she thought, to make him in all respects her friend of friends; to tell him everything; to keep no fear, no doubt, no aspiration a secret from him. “Love you, oh my dearest, thou very pearl of my heart, love you indeed! Oh, yes. Do you not know that not even for an instant could I hide my love? Are you not aware, did you not see at the moment, that when you first knelt at my feet, my heart had flown to you without an effort on my part to arrest it? But now, my beloved one, now we understand each other. Now there need be no reproaches between us. Now there need be no speaking

of distrust. I am all yours,—only it is not fit, as you know, dearest, that the poor Quaker girl should become your wife. Now that we both understand that, why should we be sad? Why should we mourn?" Why should she not succeed in bringing things to such a pass as this; and if so, why should life be unhappy either to him or to her?

Thus she was thinking of it till she had almost brought herself to a state of bliss, when her father returned to her. "Father," she said, getting up and embracing his arm as he stood, "it is all over."

"What is over?" asked the Quaker.

"He has been here."

"Well, Marion; and what has he said?"

"What he said it is hardly for me to tell you. What I said,——I would you could know it all without my repeating a word of it."

"Has he gone away contented?"

"Nay, not that, father. I hardly expected that. I hardly hoped for that. Had he been quite contented perhaps I might not have been so."

"Why should you not have both been made happy?" asked the father.

"It may be that we shall be so. It may be that he shall understand."

"Thou hast not taken his offer then?"

"Oh, no! No, father, no. I can never accept his offer. If that be in your mind put it forth. You shall never see your Marion the wife of any man, whether of that young lord or of another more fitted to her. No one ever shall be allowed to speak to me as he has spoken."

"Why dost thou make thyself different from other girls?" he said, angrily.

"Oh, father, father!"

"It is romance and false sentiment, than which nothing is more odious to me. There is no reason why thou shouldst be different from others. The Lord has not marked thee out as different from other girls, either in His pleasure or His displeasure. It is wrong for thee to think it of thyself." She looked up piteously into his face, but said not a word. "It is thy duty to take thyself from His hands as He has made thee; and to give way to no vain ecstatic terrors. If, as I gather from thy words, this young man be dear to thee, and if, as I gather from this second coming of his, thou art dear to him, then I as thy father tell thee that thy duty calls thee to him. It is not that he is a lord."

"Oh, no, father."

"It is not, I say, that he is a lord, or that he is rich, or that he is comely to the eyes, that I would have thee go to him as his wife. It is because thou and he love each other, as it is the ordinance of the Lord Almighty that men and women should do. Marriage is honourable, and I, thy father, would fain see thee married. I believe the young man to be good and true. I could give thee to him, lord though he be, with a trusting heart, and think that in so disposing of my child I had done well for her. Think of this, Marion, if it be not already too late." All this he had said standing, so that he was able to leave the room without the ceremony of rising from his chair. Without giving her a moment for reply, having his hand on the lock of the door as he uttered the last words of his counsel to her, he marched off, leaving her alone.

It may be doubted whether at the moment she could have found words for reply, so full was her heart with

the feelings that were crowded there. But she was well aware that all her father's words could go for nothing. Of only one thing was she sure,—that no counsel, no eloquence, no love would ever induce her to become the wife of Lord Hampstead.

CHAPTER XXIX.
MRS. DEMIJOHN'S PARTY.

"MRS. DEMIJOHN presents her compliments to Mr. Crocker, and begs the honour of his company to tea at nine o'clock on Wednesday, 31st of December, to see the New Year in.

"R.I.V.P. (Do come, C. D.)

"10, Paradise Row, Holloway.

"29th December, 18—."

This note was delivered to Crocker on his arrival at his office on the morning of Saturday, the 27th.

It must be explained that Crocker had lately made the acquaintance of Miss Clara Demijohn without any very formal introduction. Crocker, with that determination which marked his character, in pursuit of the one present purport of his mind to effect a friendly reconciliation with George Roden, had taken himself down to Holloway, and had called at No. 11, thinking that he might induce his friend's mother to act on his behalf in a matter appertaining to peace and charity. Mrs. Roden had unhappily been from home, but he had had the good fortune to encounter Miss Demijohn. Perhaps it was that she had seen him going in and out of the

house, and had associated him with the great mystery of the young nobleman; perhaps she had been simply attracted by the easy air with which he cocked his hat and swung his gloves;—or, perhaps it was simply chance. But so it was that in the gloom of the evening she met him just round the corner opposite to the “Duchess of Edinburgh,” and the happy acquaintance was commenced. No doubt, as in all such cases, it was the gentleman who spoke first. Let us, at any rate, hope so for the sake of Paradise Row generally. Be that as it may, before many minutes were over she had explained to him that Mrs. Roden had gone out in a cab soon after dinner, and that probably something was up at Wimbledon, as Mrs. Roden never went anywhere else, and this was not the day of the week on which her visits to Mrs. Vincent were generally made. Crocker, who was simplicity itself, soon gave her various details as to his own character and position in life. He, too, was a clerk in the Post Office, and was George Roden’s particular friend. “Oh, yes; he knew all about Lord Hampstead, and was, he might say, intimately acquainted with his lordship. He had been in the habit of meeting his lordship at Castle Hautboy, the seat of his friend, Lord Persillage, and had often ridden with his lordship in the hunting-field. He knew all about Lady Frances and the engagement, and had had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of her ladyship. He had been corresponding lately with Lord Hampstead on the subject. No;—he had not as yet heard anything of Marion Fay, the Quaker’s daughter. Then Clara had something to say on her side. She quite understood that if she expected to be communicated with, she also must communicate; and moreover,

young Mr. Crocker was by his age, appearance, and sex, just such a one as prompted her to be communicative without loss of self-respect. What was the good of telling things to Mrs. Duffer, who was only an old widow without any friends, and with very small means of existence? She had communicated her secrets to Mrs. Duffer simply from want of a better pair of ears into which she could pour them. But here was one in telling secrets to whom she could take delight, and who had secrets of his own to give in return. It is not to be supposed that the friendship which arose grew from the incidents of one meeting only. On that first evening Crocker could not leave the fair one without making arrangements for a further interview, and so the matter grew. The intimacy between them was already of three days' standing when the letter of invitation above given reached Crocker's hands. To tell the very truth, the proposed party was made up chiefly for Crocker's sake. What is the good of having a young man if you cannot show him to your friends?

"Crocker!" said Mrs. Demijohn to her niece; "where did you pick up Crocker?"

"What questions you do ask, aunt! Pick him up, indeed!"

"So you have——; picked him up, as you're always a doing with young men. Only you never know how to keep 'em when you've got 'em."

"I declare, aunt, your vulgarity is unbearable."

"I'm not going to have any Crocker in my house," said the old woman, "unless I know where he comes from. Perhaps he's a counter-skipper. He may be a ticket-of-leave man for all you know."

"Aunt Jemima, you're so provoking that I sometimes think I shall have to leave you."

"Where will you go to, my dear?"

To this question, which had often been asked before, Clara thought it unnecessary to make any answer; but returned at once to the inquiries which were not unnaturally made by the lady who stood to her in the place of a mother. "Mr. Crocker, Aunt Jemima, is a clerk in the Post Office, who sits at the same desk with George Roden, and is intimately acquainted both with Lord Hampstead and with Lady Frances Trafford. He used to be George Roden's bosom friend; but there has lately been some little tiff between the young men, which would be so pleasant if we could make it up. You have got to a speaking acquaintance with Mrs. Roden, and perhaps if you will ask them they'll come. I am sure Marion Fay will come, because you always get your money from Pogson and Littlebird. I wish I had the cheek to ask Lord Hampstead." Having heard all this, the old lady consented to receive our sporting friend from the Post Office, and also assented to the other invitations, which were given.

Crocker, of course, sent his compliments, and expressed the great pleasure he would have in "seeing the New Year in" in company with Mrs. Demijohn. As the old lady was much afflicted with rheumatism, the proposition as coming from her would have been indiscreet had she not known that her niece on such occasions was well able to act as her deputy. Mrs. Roden also promised to come, and with difficulty persuaded her son that it would be gracious on his part to be so far civil to his neighbours. Had he known that Crocker also would be there he certainly would

not have yielded; but Crocker, when at the office, kept the secret of his engagement to himself. The Quaker also and Marion Fay were to be there. Mr. Fay and Mrs. Demijohn had long known each other in regard to matters of business, and he, for the sake of Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird's firm, could not refuse to drink a cup of tea at their client's house. A junior clerk from the same counting-house, one Daniel Tribbledale by name, with whom Clara had made acquaintance at King's Court some two years since, was also to be of the party. Mr. Tribbledale had at one time, among all Clara's young men, been the favourite. But circumstances had occurred which had somewhat lessened her goodwill towards him. Mr. Littlebird had quarrelled with him, and he had been refused promotion. It was generally supposed at the present time in the neighbourhood of Old Broad Street that Daniel Tribbledale was languishing for the love of Clara Demijohn. Mrs. Duffer, of course, was to be there, and so the list of friends for the festive occasion was completed.

Mrs. Duffer was the first to come. Her aid, indeed, was required for the cutting up of the cakes and arrangements of the cups and saucers. The Quaker and his daughter were next, appearing exactly at nine o'clock,—to do which he protested to be the best sign of good manners that could be shown. "If they want me at ten, why do they ask me at nine?" demanded the Quaker. Marion was forced to give way, though she was by no means anxious to spend a long evening in company with Mrs. Demijohn. As to that seeing of the New Year in, it was quite out of the question for the Quaker or for his daughter. The company altogether came early. The only touch of fashion evinced on this occasion was shown

by Mr. Crocker. The Rodens, with Mr. Tribbledale at their heels, appeared not long after Mr. Fay, and then the demolition of the Sally Lunn's was commenced. "I declare I think he means to deceive us," whispered Clara to her friend, Mrs. Duffer, when all the good tea had been consumed before the young man appeared. "I don't suppose he cares much for tea," said Mrs. Duffer; "they don't now-a-days." "It isn't just for the tea that a man is expected to come," said Clara, indignantly. It was now nearly ten, and she could not but feel that the evening was going heavily. Tribbledale had said one tender word to her; but she had snubbed him, expecting Crocker to be there almost at once, and he had retired silent into a corner. George Roden had altogether declined to make himself agreeable to her; but as he was an engaged man, and engaged to a lady of rank, much could not be expected of him. Mrs. Roden and the Quaker and Mrs. Demijohn did manage to keep up something of conversation. Roden from time to time said a few words to Marion. Clara, who was repenting herself of her hardness to young Tribbledale, was forced to put up with Mrs. Duffer. When suddenly there came a thundering knock at the door, and Mr. Crocker was announced by the maid, who had been duly instructed beforehand as to all peculiarities in the names of the guests.

There was a little stir, as there always is when a solitary guest comes in much after the appointed time. Of course there was rebuke,—suppressed rebuke from Mrs. Demijohn, mild rebuke from Mrs. Duffer, a very outburst of rebuke from Clara. But Crocker was up to the occasion. "Upon my word, ladies, I had no help for it. I was dining with a few friends in the City, and I

couldn't get away earlier. If my own ideas of happiness had been consulted I should have been here an hour ago. Ah, Roden, how are you? Though I know you live in the same street, I didn't think of meeting you." Roden gave him a nod, but did not vouchsafe him a word. "How's his lordship? I told you, didn't I, that I had heard from him the other day?" Crocker had mentioned more than once at his office the fact that he had received a letter from Lord Hampstead.

"I don't often see him, and very rarely hear from him," said Roden, without turning away from Marion to whom he was at the moment speaking.

"If all our young noblemen were like Hampstead," said Crocker, who had told the truth in declaring that he had been dining, "England would be a very different sort of place from what it is. The most affable young lord that ever sat in the House of Peers." Then he turned himself towards Marion Fay, at whose identity he made a guess. He was anxious at once to claim her as a mutual friend, as connected with himself by her connection with the lord in question. But as he could find no immediate excuse for introducing himself, he only winked at her.

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Tribbledale, Mr. Crocker?" asked Clara.

"Never had the pleasure as yet," said Crocker. Then the introduction was effected. "In the Civil Service?" asked Crocker. Tribbledale blushed, and of necessity repudiated the honour. "I thought, perhaps, you were in the Customs. You have something of the H.M.S. cut about you." Tribbledale acknowledged the compliment with a bow. "I think the Service is the best thing a man can do with himself," continued Crocker.

"It is genteel," said Mrs. Duffer.

"And the hours so pleasant," said Clara. "Bank clerks have always to be there by nine."

"Is a young man to be afraid of that?" asked the Quaker, indignantly. "Ten till four, with one hour for the newspapers and another for lunch. See the consequence. I never knew a young man yet from a public office who understood the meaning of a day's work."

"I think that is a little hard," said Roden. "If a man really works, six hours continuously is as much as he can do with any good to his employers or himself."

"Well done, Roden," said Crocker. "Stick up for Her Majesty's shop." Roden turned himself more round than before, and continued to address himself to Marion.

"Our employers wouldn't think much of us," said the Quaker, "if we didn't do better for them than that in private offices. I say that the Civil Service destroys a young man, and teaches him to think that the bread of idleness is sweet. As far as I can see, nothing is so destructive of individual energy as what is called public money. If Daniel Tribbledale would bestir himself he might do very well in the world without envying any young man his seat either at the Custom House or the Post Office." Mr. Fay had spoken so seriously that they all declined to carry that subject further. Mrs. Demijohn and Mrs. Duffer murmured their agreement, thinking it civil to do so, as the Quaker was a guest. Tribbledale sat silent in his corner, awestruck at the idea of having given rise to the conversation. Crocker winked at Mrs. Demijohn, and thrust his hands into his pockets as much as to say that he could get the better of the Quaker

altogether if he chose to exercise his powers of wit and argument.

Soon after this Mr. Fay rose to take his daughter away. "But," said Clara, with affected indignation, "you are to see the Old Year out and the New Year in."

"I have seen enough of the one," said Mr. Fay, "and shall see enough of the other if I live to be as near its close as I am to its birth."

"But there are refreshments coming up," said Mrs. Demijohn.

"I have refreshed myself sufficiently with thy tea, madam. I rarely take anything stronger before retiring to my rest. Come, Marion, thou requirest to be at no form of welcoming the New Year. Thou, too, wilt be better in thy bed, as thy duties call upon thee to be early." So saying, the Quaker bowed formally to each person present, and took his daughter out with him under his arm. Mrs. Roden and her son escaped almost at the same moment, and Mrs. Demijohn, having waited to take what she called just a thimbleful of hot toddy, went also to her rest.

"Here's a pretty way of seeing the New Year in," said Clara, laughing.

"We are quite enough of us for the purpose," said Crocker, "unless we also are expected to go away." But as he spoke he mixed a tumbler of brandy and water, which he divided among two smaller glasses, handing them to the two ladies present.

"I declare," said Mrs. Duffer, "I never do anything of the kind,—almost never."

"On such an occasion as this everybody does it," said Crocker.

"I hope Mr. Tribbledale will join us," said Clara.

Then the bashful clerk came out of his corner, and seating himself at the table prepared to do as he was bid. He made his toddy very weak, not because he disliked brandy, but guided by an innate spirit of modesty which prevented him always from going more than halfway when he was in company.

Then the evening became very pleasant. "You are quite sure that he is really engaged to her ladyship?" asked Clara.

"I wish I were as certainly engaged to you," replied the polite Crocker.

"What nonsense you do talk, Mr. Crocker;—and before other people too. But you think he is?"

"I am sure of it. Both Hampstead and she have told me so much themselves out of their own mouths."

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Duffer.

"And here's her brother engaged to Marion Fay," said Clara. Crocker declared that as to this he was by no means so well assured. Lord Hampstead in spite of their intimacy had told him nothing about it. "But it is so, Mr. Crocker, as sure as ever you are sitting there. He has been coming here after her over and over again, and was closeted with her only last Friday for hours. It was a holiday, but that sly old Quaker went out of the way, so as to leave them together. That Mrs. Roden, though she's as stiff as buckram, knows all about it. To the best of my belief she got it all up. Marion Fay is with her every day. It's my belief there's something we don't understand yet. She's got a hold of them young people, and means to do just what she likes with 'em." Crocker, however, could not agree to this. He had heard of Lord Hampstead's peculiar politics, and was assured that the young lord was only

carrying out his peculiar principles in selecting Marion Fay for himself and devoting his sister to George Roden.

"Not that I like that kind of thing, if you ask me," said Crocker. "I'm very fond of Hampstead, and I've always found Lady Frances to be a pleasant and affable lady. I've no cause to speak other than civil of both of them. But when a man has been born a lord, and a lady a lady——. A lady of that kind, Miss Demi-john."

"Oh, exactly;—titled you mean, Mr. Crocker?"

"Quite high among the nobs, you know. Hampstead will be a Marquis some of these days, which is next to a Duke."

"And do you know him,—yourself?" asked Tribble-dale with a voice of awe.

"Oh, yes," said Crocker.

"To speak to him when you see him?"

"I had a long correspondence with him about a week ago about a matter which interested both of us very much."

"And how does he address you?" asked Clara,—also with something of awe.

"'Dear Crocker;—just that. I always say 'My dear Lord Hampstead,' in return. I look upon 'Dear Hampstead,' as a little vulgar, you know, and I always think that one ought to be particular in these matters. But, as I was saying, when it comes to marriage, people ought to be true to themselves. Now if I was a Marquis,—I don't know what I mightn't do if I saw you, you know, Clara." "Clara" pouted, but did not appear to have been offended either by the compliment or by the familiarity. "But under any other circumstances less forcible I would stick to my order."

"So would I," said Mrs. Duffer. "Marquises ought to marry marquises, and dukes dukes."

"There it is!" said Clara, "and now we must drink its health, and I hope we may be all married to them we like best before it comes round again." This had reference to the little clock on the mantelpiece, the hands of which had just crept round to twelve o'clock.

"I wish we might," said Crocker, "and have a baby in the cradle too."

"Go away," said Clara.

"That would be quick," said Mrs. Duffer. "What do you say, Mr. Tribbledale?"

"Where my heart's fixed," said Tribbledale, who was just becoming warm with the brandy-and-water, "there ain't no hope for this year, nor yet for the one after." Whereupon Crocker remarked that "care killed a cat."

"You just put on your coat and hat, and take me across to my lodgings. See if I don't give you a chance," said Mrs. Duffer, who was also becoming somewhat merry under the influences of the moment. But she knew that it was her duty to do something for her young hostess, and, true woman as she was, thought that this was the best way of doing it. Tribbledale did as he was bid, though he was obliged thus to leave his lady-love and her new admirer together. "Do you really mean it?" said Clara, when she and Crocker were alone.

"Of course I do,—honest," said Crocker.

"Then you may," said Clara, turning her face to him.

CHAPTER XXX.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

CROCKER had by no means as yet got through his evening. Having dined with his friends in the City, and "drank tea" with the lady of his love, he was disposed to proceed, if not to pleasanter delights, at any rate to those which might be more hilarious. Every Londoner, from Holloway up to Gower Street, in which he lived, would be seeing the New Year in,—and beyond Gower Street down in Holborn, and from thence all across to the Strand, especially in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden and the theatres, there would be a whole world of happy revellers engaged in the same way. On such a night as this there could certainly be no need of going to bed soon after twelve for such a one as Samuel Crocker. In Paradise Row he again encountered Tribbledale, and suggested to that young man that they should first have a glass of something at the "Duchess" and then proceed to more exalted realms in a hansom. "I did think of walking there this fine starlight night," said Tribbledale, mindful of the small stipend at which his services were at present valued by Pogson and Littlebird. But Crocker soon got the better of all this. "I'll stand Sammy for this occasion," said he. "The New Year comes in only once in twelve months." Then Tribbledale went into "The Duchess," and after that was as indifferent, while his money lasted him, as was Crocker himself. "I've loved that girl for

three years," said Tribbledale, as soon as they had left "The Duchess" and were again in the open air.

It was a beautiful night, and Crocker thought that they might as well walk a little way. It was pleasant under the bright stars to hear of the love adventures of his new friend, especially as he himself was now the happy hero. "For three years?" he asked.

"Indeed I have, Crocker." That glass of hot whiskey-and-water, though it enhanced the melancholy tenderness of the young man, robbed him of his bashfulness, and loosened the strings of his tongue. "For three years! And there was a time when she worshipped the very stool on which I sat at the office. I don't like to boast."

"You have to be short, sharp, and decisive if you mean to get a girl like that to travel with you."

"I should have taken the ball at the hop, Crocker; that's what I ought to have done. But I see it all now. She's as fickle as she is fair;—fickler, perhaps, if anything."

"Come, Tribbledale; I ain't going to let you abuse her, you know."

"I don't want to abuse her. God knows I love her too well in spite of all. It's your turn now. I can see that. There's a great many of them have had their turns."

"Were there now?" asked Crocker anxiously.

"There was Pollocky;—him at the Highbury Gas Works. He came after me. It was because of him she dropped me."

"Was that going on for a marriage?"

"Right ahead, I used to think. Pollocky is a widower with five children."

“Oh Lord!”

“But he’s the head of all the gas, and has four hundred a year. It wasn’t love as carried her on with him. I could see that. She wouldn’t go and meet him anywhere about the City, as she did me. I suppose Pollocky is fifty, if he’s a day.”

“And she dropped him also?”

“Or else it was he.” On receipt of this information Crocker whistled. “It was something about money,” continued Tribbledale. “The old woman wouldn’t part.”

“There is money I suppose?”

“The old woman has a lot.”

“And isn’t the niece to have it?” asked Crocker.

“No doubt she will; because there never was a pair more loving. But the old lady will keep it herself as long as she is here.” Then there entered an idea into Crocker’s head that if he could manage to make Clara his own, he might have power enough to manage the aunt as well as the niece. They had a little more whiskey-and-water at the Angel at Islington before they got into the cab which was to take them down to the Paphian Music-Hall, and after that Tribbledale passed from the realm of partial fact to that of perfect poetry. “He would never,” he said, “abandon Clara Demijohn, though he should live to an age beyond that of any known patriarch. He quite knew all that there was against him. Crocker he thought might probably prevail. He rather hoped that Crocker might prevail;—for why should not so good a fellow be made happy, seeing how utterly impossible it was that he, Daniel Tribbledale, should ever reach that perfect bliss in dreaming of which he passed his miserable existence. But as to one thing he had quite made up his mind. The day that

saw Clara Demijohn a bride would most undoubtedly be the last of his existence."

"Oh, no, damme; you won't," said Crocker turning round upon him in the cab.

"I shall!" said Tribbledale with emphasis. "And I've made up my mind how to do it too. They've caged up the Monument, and you're so looked after on the Duke of York's, that there isn't a chance. But there's nothing to prevent you from taking a header at the Whispering Gallery of Saint Paul's. You'd be more talked of that way, and the vergers would be sure to show the stains made on the stones below. 'It was here young Tribbledale fell,—a clerk at Puggon and Littlebird's, who dashed out his brains for love on the very day as Clara Demijohn got herself married.' I'm of that disposition, Crocker, as I'd do anything for love;—anything." Crocker was obliged to reply that he trusted he might never be the cause of such a fatal attempt at glory; but he went on to explain that in the pursuit of love a man could not in any degree give way to friendship. Even though numberless lovers might fall from the Whispering Gallery in a confused heap of mangled bodies, he must still tread the path which was open to him. These were his principles, and he could not abandon them even for the sake of Tribbledale. "Nor would I have you," shouted Tribbledale, leaning out over the door of the cab. "I would not delay you not for a day, not for an hour. Were to-morrow to be your bridal morning it would find me prepared. My only request to you is that a boy might be called Daniel after me. You might tell her it was an uncle or grandfather. She would never think that in her own child was perpetuated a monument of poor Daniel Tribble-

dale." Crocker, as he jumped out of the cab with a light step in front of the Paphian Hall, promised that in this particular he would attend to the wishes of his friend.

The performances at the Paphian Hall on that festive occasion need not be described here with accuracy. The New Year had been seen well in with music, dancing, and wine. The seeing of it in was continued yet for an hour, till an indulgent policeman was forced to interfere. It is believed that on the final ejection of our two friends, the forlorn lover, kept steady, no doubt, by the weight of his woe, did find his way home to his own lodgings. The exultant Crocker was less fortunate, and passed his night without the accommodation of sheets and blankets somewhere in the neighbourhood of Bow Street. The fact is important to us, as it threatened to have considerable effect upon our friend's position at his office. Having been locked up in a cell during the night, and kept in durance till he was brought on the following morning before a magistrate, he could not well be in his room at ten o'clock. Indeed when he did escape from the hands of the Philistines, at about two in the day, sick, unwashed and unfed, he thought it better to remain away altogether for that day. The great sin of total absence would be better than making an appearance before Mr. Jerningham in his present tell-tale condition. He well knew his own strength and his own weakness. All power of repartee would be gone from him for the day. Mr. Jerningham would domineer over him, and Æolus, should the violent god be pleased to send for him, would at once annihilate him. So he sneaked home to Gower Street, took a hair of the dog that bit him, and

then got the old woman who looked after him to make him some tea and to fry a bit of bacon for him. In this ignominious way he passed New Year's Day,—at least so much of it as was left to him after the occurrences which have been described.

But on the next morning the great weight of his troubles fell upon him heavily. In his very heart of hearts he was afraid of Æolus. In spite of his "brummagem" courage the wrath of the violent god was tremendous to him. He knew what it was to stand with his hand on the lock of the door and tremble before he dared to enter the room. There was something in the frown of the god which was terrible to him. There was something worse in the god's smile. He remembered how he had once been unable to move himself out of the room when the god had told him that he need not remain at the office, but might go home and amuse himself just as he pleased. Nothing crushes a young man so much as an assurance that his presence can be dispensed with without loss to any one. Though Crocker had often felt the mercies of Æolus, and had told himself again and again that the god never did in truth lift up his hand for final irrevocable punishment, still he trembled as he anticipated the dread encounter.

When the morning came, and while he was yet in his bed, he struggled to bethink himself of some strategy by which he might evade the evil hour. Could he have been sent for suddenly into Cumberland? But in this case he would of course have telegraphed to the Post Office on the preceding day. Could he have been taken ill with a fit,—so as to make his absence absolutely necessary, say for an entire week? He well knew that they had a doctor at the Post Office, a crafty, far-seeing,

obdurate man, who would be with him at once and would show him no mercy. He had tried these schemes all round, and had found that there were none left with which Æolus was not better acquainted than was he himself. There was nothing for it but to go and bear the brunt.

Exactly at ten o'clock he entered the room, hung his hat up on the accustomed peg, and took his seat on the accustomed chair before any one spoke a word to him. Roden on the opposite seat took no notice of him. "Bedad, he's here anyhow this morning," whispered Geraghty to Bobbin, very audibly. "Mr. Crocker," said Mr. Jerningham, "you were absent throughout the entire day yesterday. Have you any account to give of yourself?" There was certainly falsehood implied in this question, as Mr. Jerningham knew very well what had become of Crocker. Crocker's misadventure at the police office had found its way into the newspapers, and had been discussed by Æolus with Mr. Jerningham. I am afraid that Mr. Jerningham must have intended to tempt the culprit into some false excuse.

"I was horribly ill," said Crocker, without stopping the pen with which he was making entries in the big book before him. This no doubt was true, and so far the trap had been avoided.

"What made you ill, Mr. Crocker?"

"Headache."

"It seems to me, Mr. Crocker, you're more subject to such attacks as these than any young man in the office."

"I always was as a baby," said Crocker, resuming something of his courage. Could it be possible that Æolus should not have heard of the day's absence?

"There is ill-health of so aggravated a nature," said

Mr. Jerningham, "as to make the sufferer altogether unfit for the Civil Service."

"I'm happy to say I'm growing out of them gradually," said Crocker. Then Geraghty got up from his chair and whispered the whole truth into the sufferer's ears. "It was all in the *Pall Mall* yesterday, and *Æolus* knew it before he went away." A sick qualm came upon the poor fellow as though it were a repetition of yesterday's sufferings. But still it was necessary that he should say something. "New Year's Day comes only once a year, I suppose."

"It was only a few weeks since that you remained a day behind your time when you were on leave. But Sir Boreas has taken the matter up, and I have nothing to say to it. No doubt Sir Boreas will send for you." Sir Boreas Bodkin was that great Civil servant in the General Post Office whom men were wont to call *Æolus*.

It was a wretched morning for poor Crocker. He was not sent for till one o'clock, just at the moment when he was going to eat his lunch! That horrid sickness, the combined result of the dinner in the City, of Mrs. Demijohn's brandy, and of the many whiskies which followed, still clung to him. The mutton-chop and porter which he had promised himself would have relieved him; but now he was obliged to appear before the god in all his weakness. Without a word he followed a messenger who had summoned him, with his tail only too visibly between his legs. *Æolus* was writing a note when he was ushered into the room, and did not condescend to arrest himself in the progress merely because Crocker was present. *Æolus* well knew the effect on a sinner of

having to stand silent and all alone in the presence of an offended deity.

“So, Mr. Crocker,” said Æolus at last, looking up from his completed work; “no doubt you saw the Old Year out on Wednesday night.” The jokes of the god were infinitely worse to bear than his most furious blasts. “Like some other great men,” continued Æolus, “you have contrived to have your festivities chronicled in the newspapers.” Crocker found it impossible to utter a word. “You have probably seen the *Pall Mall* of yesterday, and the *Standard* of this morning?”

“I haven’t looked at the newspaper, sir, since——”

“Since the festive occasion,” suggested Æolus.

“Oh, Sir Boreas——”

“Well, Mr. Crocker; what is it that you have to say for yourself?”

“I did dine with a few friends.”

“And kept it up tolerably late, I should think.”

“And then afterwards went to a tea-party,” said Crocker.

“A tea-party!”

“It was not all tea,” said Crocker, with a whine.

“I should think not. There was a good deal besides tea, I should say.” Then the god left off to smile, and the blasts began to blow. “Now, Mr. Crocker, I should like to know what you think of yourself. After having read the accounts of your appearance before the magistrate in two newspapers, I suppose I may take it for granted that you were abominably drunk out in the streets on Wednesday night.” It is very hard for a young man to have to admit under any circumstances that he has been abominably drunk out in the streets;—so that Crocker stood dumb before his accuser. “I

choose to have an answer, sir. I must either have your own acknowledgment, or must have an official account from the police magistrate."

"I had taken something, sir."

"Were you drunk? If you will not answer me you had better go, and I shall know how to deal with you." Crocker thought that he had perhaps better go and leave the god to deal with him. He remained quite silent. "Your personal habits would be nothing to me, sir," continued Æolus, "if you were able to do your work and did not bring disgrace on the department. But you neglect the office. You are unable to do your work. And you do bring disgrace on the department. How long is it since you remained away a day before?"

"I was detained down in Cumberland for one day, after my leave of absence."

"Detained in Cumberland! I never tell a gentleman, Mr. Crocker, that I do not believe him,—never. If it comes to that with a gentleman, he must go." This was hard to bear; but yet Crocker was aware that he had told a fib on that occasion in reference to the day's hunting. Then Sir Boreas took up his pen and again had recourse to his paper, as though the interview was over. Crocker remained standing, not quite knowing what he was expected to do. "It's of no use your remaining there," said Sir Boreas. Whereupon Crocker retired, and, with his tail still between his legs, returned to his own desk. Soon afterwards Mr. Jerningham was sent for, and came back with an intimation that Mr. Crocker's services were no longer required, at any rate for that day. When the matter had been properly represented to the Postmaster-General, a letter would be

written to him. The impression made on the minds of Bobbin and Geraghty was that poor Crocker would certainly be dismissed on this occasion. Roden, too, thought that it was now over with the unfortunate young man, as far as the Queen's service was concerned, and could not abstain from shaking hands with the unhappy wretch as he bade them all a melancholy good-bye. "Good afternoon," said Mr. Jerningham to him severely, not condescending to shake hands with him at all.

But Mr. Jerningham heard the last words which the god had spoken on the subject, and was not therefore called upon to be specially soft-hearted. "I never saw a poor devil look so sick in my life," Æolus had said.

"He must have been very bad, Sir Boreas."

Æolus was fond of a good dinner himself, and had a sympathy for convivial offences. Indeed for all offences he had a sympathy. No man less prone to punish ever lived. But what is a man to do with inveterate offenders? Æolus would tear his hair sometimes in dismay because he knew that he was retaining in the service men whom he would have been bound to get rid of had he done his duty. "You had better tell him to go home," said Æolus,—“for to-day, you know.”

"And what then, Sir Boreas?"

"I suppose he'll sleep it off by to-morrow. Have a letter written to him,—to frighten him, you know. After all, New Year's Day only does come once a year." Mr. Jerningham, having thus received instructions, went back to his room and dismissed Crocker in the way we have seen. As soon as Crocker's back was turned Roden was desired to write the letter.

"SIR,

"Your conduct in absenting yourself without leave from the office yesterday is of such a nature as to make it necessary for me to inform you, that should it be repeated I shall have no alternative but to bring your name under the serious consideration of my Lord the Postmaster-General.

"I am, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

(Signed)

"BOREA BODKIN."

In the same envelope was a short note from one of his brother clerks.

"DEAR CROCKER,

"You had better be here sharp at ten to-morrow. Mr. Jerningham bids me tell you.

"Yours truly,

"BART. BODKIN."

Thus Crocker got through his troubles on this occasion.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MISS DEMIJOHN'S INGENUITY.

ON the day on which Crocker was going through his purgatory at the Post Office, a letter reached Lady Kingsbury at Trafford Park, which added much to the troubles and annoyances felt by different members of the family there. It was an anonymous letter, and the reader,—who in regard to such mysteries should never be kept a moment in ignorance,—may as well be told at once that the letter was written by that enterprising young lady, Miss Demijohn. The letter was written on New Year's Day, after the party,—perhaps in consequence of the party, as the rash doings of some of the younger members of the Trafford family were made specially obvious to Miss Demijohn by what was said on that occasion. The letter ran as follows:

“MY LADY MARCHIONESS—

“I conceive it to be my duty as a well-wisher of the family to inform you that your stepson, Lord Hampstead, has become entangled in what I think to be a dangerous way with a young woman living in a neighbouring street to this.” The “neighbouring” street was of course a stroke of cunning on the part of Miss Demijohn. “She lives at No. 17, Paradise Row, Holloway, and her name is Marion Fay. She is daughter to an old Quaker, who is clerk to Pogson and Littlebird, King's Court, Great Broad Street, and isn't of course in any position to entertain such hopes as these. He may have

a little money saved, but what's that to the likes of your ladyship and his lordship the Marquis? Some think she is pretty. I don't. Now I don't like such cunning ways. Of what I tell your ladyship there isn't any manner of doubt. His lordship was there for hours the other day, and the girl is going about as proud as a peacock.

"It's what I call a regular Paradise Row conspiracy, and though the Quaker has lent himself to it, he ain't at the bottom. Next door but two to the Fays there is a Mrs. Roden living, who has got a son, a stuck-up fellow and clerk in the Post Office. I believe there isn't a bit of doubt but he has been and got himself engaged to another of your ladyship's noble family. As to that, all Holloway is talking of it. I don't believe there is a 'bus driver up and down the road as doesn't know it. It's my belief that Mrs. Roden is the doing of it all! She has taken Marion Fay by the hand just as though she were her own, and now she has got the young lord and the young lady right into her meshes. If none of 'em isn't married yet it won't be long so unless somebody interferes. If you don't believe me do you send to the 'Duchess of Edinburgh' at the corner, and you'll find that they know all about it.

"Now, my Lady Marchioness, I've thought it my duty to tell you all this because I don't like to see a noble family put upon. There isn't nothing for me to get out of it myself. But I do it just as one of the family's well-wishers. Therefore I sign myself your very respectful,

"A WELL WISHER."

The young lady had told her story completely as far as her object was concerned, which was simply that

of making mischief. But the business of anonymous letter-writing was one not new to her hand. It is easy, and offers considerable excitement to the minds of those whose time hangs heavy on their hands.

The Marchioness, though she would probably have declared beforehand that anonymous letters were of all things the most contemptible, nevertheless read this more than once with a great deal of care. And she believed it altogether. As to Lady Frances, of course she knew the allegations to be true. Seeing that the writer was so well acquainted with the facts as to Lady Frances, why should she be less well-informed in reference to Lord Hampstead? Such a marriage as this with the Quaker girl was exactly the sort of match which Hampstead would be pleased to make. Then she was especially annoyed by the publicity of the whole affair. That Holloway and the drivers of the omnibuses, and the "Duchess of Edinburgh" should know all the secrets of her husband's family,—should be able to discuss the disgrace to which "her own darlings" would be subjected, was terrible to her. But perhaps the sting that went sharpest to her heart was that which came from the fact that Lord Hampstead was about to be married at all. Let the wife be a Quaker or what not, let her be as low as any woman that could be found within the sound of Bow Bells, still, if the marriage ceremony were once pronounced over them, that woman's son would become Lord Highgate, and would be heir to all the wealth and all the titles of the Marquis of Kingsbury,—to the absolute exclusion of the eldest-born of her own darlings.

She had had her hopes in the impracticability of Lord Hampstead. Such men as that, she had told her-

self, were likely to keep themselves altogether free of marriage. He would not improbably, she thought, entertain some abominable but not unlucky idea that marriage in itself was an absurdity. At any rate, there was hope as long as he could be kept unmarried. Were he to marry and then have a son, even though he broke his neck out hunting next day, no good would come of it. In this condition of mind she thought it well to show the letter to Mr. Greenwood before she read it to her husband. Lord Kingsbury was still very ill,—so ill as to have given rise to much apprehension; but still it would be necessary to discuss this letter with him, ill as he might be. Only it should be first discussed with Mr. Greenwood.

Mr. Greenwood's face became flatter, and his jaw longer, and his eyes more like gooseberries as he read the letter. He had gradually trained himself to say and to hear all manner of evil things about Lady Frances in the presence of the Marchioness. He had too accustomed himself to speak of Lord Hampstead as a great obstacle which it would be well if the Lord would think proper to take out of the way. He had also so far followed the lead of his patroness as to be deep if not loud in his denunciations of the folly of the Marquis. The Marquis had sent him word that he had better look out for a new home, and without naming an especial day for his dismissal, had given him to understand that it would not be convenient to receive him again in the house in Park Lane. But the Marquis had been ill when he had thus expressed his displeasure,—and was now worse. It might be that the Marquis himself would never again visit Park Lane. As no positive limit had been fixed for Mr. Greenwood's departure from

Trafford Park, there he remained,—and there he intended to remain for the present. As he folded up the letter carefully after reading it slowly, he only shook his head.

“Is it true, I wonder?” asked the Marchioness.

“There is no reason why it should not be.”

“That’s just what I say to myself. We know it is true about Fanny. Of course there’s that Mr. Roden, and the Mrs. Roden. When the writer knows so much, there is reason to believe the rest.”

“A great many people do tell a great many lies,” said Mr. Greenwood.

“I suppose there is such a person as this Quaker,—and that there is such a girl?”

“Quite likely.”

“If so, why shouldn’t Hampstead fall in love with her? Of course he’s always going to the street because of his friend Roden.”

“Not a doubt, Lady Kingsbury.”

“What ought we to do?” To this question Mr. Greenwood was not prepared with an immediate answer. If Lord Hampstead chose to get himself married to a Quaker’s daughter, how could it be helped? “His father would hardly have any influence over him now.” Mr. Greenwood shook his head. “And yet he must be told.” Mr. Greenwood nodded his head. “Perhaps something might be done about the property.”

“He wouldn’t care two straws about settlements,” said Mr. Greenwood.

“He doesn’t care about anything he ought to. If I were to write and ask him, would he tell the truth about this marriage?”

“He wouldn’t tell the truth about anything,” said Mr. Greenwood.

The Marchioness passed this by, though she knew it at the moment to be calumny. But she was not unwilling to hear calumny against Lord Hampstead. "There used to be ways," she said, "in which a marriage of that kind could be put on one side afterwards."

"You must put it on one side before, now-a-days, if you mean to do it at all," said the clergyman.

"But how?—how?"

"If he could be got out of the way."

"How out of the way?"

"Well;—that's what I don't know. Suppose he could be made to go out yachting, and she be married to somebody else when he's at sea!" Lady Kingsbury felt that her friend was but little good at a stratagem. But she felt also that she was not very good herself. She could wish; but wishing in such matters is very vain. She had right on her side. She was quite confident as to that. There could be no doubt but that "gods and men" would desire to see her little Lord Frederic succeed to the Marquisate rather than this infidel Republican. If this wretched Radical could be kept from marrying there would evidently be room for hope, because there was the fact,—proved by the incontestable evidence of Burke's Peerage,—that younger sons did so often succeed. But if another heir were to be born, then, as far as she was aware, Burke's Peerage promised her nothing. "It's a pity he shouldn't break his neck out hunting," said Mr. Greenwood.

"Even that wouldn't be much if he were to be married first," said the Marchioness.

Every day she went to her husband for half-an-hour before her lunch, at which time the nurse who attended

him during the day was accustomed to go to her dinner. He had had a physician down from London since his son had visited him, and the physician had told the Marchioness that though there was not apparently any immediate danger, still the symptoms were such as almost to preclude a hope of ultimate recovery. When this opinion had been pronounced there had arisen between the Marchioness and the chaplain a discussion as to whether Lord Hampstead should be once again summoned. The Marquis himself had expressed no such wish. A bulletin of a certain fashion had been sent three or four times a week to Hendon Hall purporting to express the doctor's opinion of the health of their noble patient; but the bulletin has not been scrupulously true. Neither of the two conspirators had wished to have Lord Hampstead at Trafford Park. Lady Kingsbury was anxious to make the separation complete between her own darlings and their brother, and Mr. Greenwood remembered, down to every tittle of a word and tone, the insolence of the rebuke which he had received from the heir. But if Lord Kingsbury were really to be dying, then they would hardly dare to keep his son in ignorance.

"I've got something I'd better show you," she said, as she seated herself by her husband's sofa. Then she proceeded to read to him the letter, without telling him as she did so that it was anonymous. When he had heard the first paragraph he demanded to know the name of the writer. "I'd better read it all first," said the Marchioness. And she did read it all to the end, closing it, however, without mentioning the final "Well-Wisher." "Of course it's anonymous," she said, as she held the letter in her hand.

"Then I don't believe a word of it," said the Marquis.

"Very likely not; but yet it sounds true."

"I don't think it sounds true at all. Why should it be true? There is nothing so wicked as anonymous letters."

"If it isn't true about Hampstead it's true at any rate of Fanny. That man comes from Holloway, and Paradise Row and the 'Duchess of Edinburgh.' Where Fanny goes for her lover, Hampstead is likely to follow. 'Birds of a feather flock together.'"

"I won't have you speak of my children in that way," said the sick lord.

"What can I do? Is it not true about Fanny? If you wish it, I will write to Hampstead and ask him all about it." In order to escape from the misery of the moment he assented to this proposition. The letter being anonymous had to his thinking been disgraceful, and therefore he had disbelieved it. And having induced himself to disbelieve the statements made, he had been drawn into expressing,—or at any rate to acknowledging by his silence,—a conviction that such a marriage as that proposed with Marion Fay would be very base. Her ladyship felt therefore that if Lord Hampstead could be got to acknowledge the engagement, something would have been done towards establishing a quarrel between the father and the son.

"Has that man gone yet?" he asked as his wife rose to leave the room.

"Has what man gone?"

"Mr. Greenwood."

"Gone? How should he have gone? It has never been expected that he should go by this time. I don't

see why he should go at all. He was told that you would not again require his services up in London. As far as I know, that is all that has been said about going." The poor man turned himself on his sofa angrily, but did not at the moment give any further instructions as to the chaplain's departure.

"He wants to know why you have not gone," Lady Kingsbury said to the clergyman that afternoon.

"Where am I to go to?" whined the unfortunate one. "Does he mean to say that I am to be turned out into the road at a moment's notice because I can't approve of what Lady Frances is doing? I haven't had any orders as to going. If I am to go I suppose he will make some arrangement first." Lady Kingsbury said what she could to comfort him, and explained that there was no necessity for his immediate departure. Perhaps the Marquis might not think of it again for another week or two; and there was no knowing in what condition they might find themselves.

Her ladyship's letter to her stepson was as follows; and by return of post her stepson's answer came;—

"MY DEAR HAMPSTEAD,—

"Tidings have reached your father that you have engaged yourself to marry a girl, the daughter of a Quaker named Fay, living at No. 17, Paradise Row. He, the Quaker, is represented as being a clerk in a counting-house in the City. Of the girl your father has heard nothing, but can only imagine that she should be such as her position would make probable. He desires me to ask you whether there is any truth in the statement. You will observe that I express no opinion myself whether it be true or false, whether proper or improper.

After your conduct the other day I should not think of interfering myself; but your father wishes me to ask for his information.

"Yours truly,

"CLARA KINGSBURY."

Hampstead's answer was very short, but quite sufficient for the purpose;—

"MY DEAR LADY KINGSBURY,

"I am not engaged to marry Miss Fay, — as yet. I think that I may be some day soon.

"Yours affectionately,

"HAMPTHEAD."

By the same post he wrote a letter to his father, and that shall also be shown to the reader.

"MY DEAR FATHER,—

"I have received a letter from Lady Kingsbury, asking me as to a report of an engagement between me and a young lady named Marion Fay. I am sorry that her writing should be evidence that you are hardly yet strong enough to write yourself. I trust that it may not long be so.

"Would you wish to see me again at Trafford? I do not like to go there without the expression of a wish from you; but I hold myself in readiness to start whenever you may desire it. I had hoped from the last accounts that you were becoming stronger.

"I do not know how you may have heard anything of Marion Fay. Had I engaged myself to her, or to any other young lady, I should have told you at once.

I do not know whether a young man is supposed to declare his own failures in such matters, when he has failed,—even to his father. But, as I am ashamed of nothing in the matter, I will avow that I have asked the young lady to be my wife, but she has as yet declined. I shall ask her again, and still hope to succeed.

“She is the daughter of a Mr. Fay who, as Lady Kingsbury says, is a Quaker, and is a clerk in a house in the City. As he is in all respects a good man, standing high for probity and honour among those who know him, I cannot think that there is any drawback. She, I think, has all the qualities which I would wish to find in the woman whom I might hope to make my wife. They live at No. 17, Paradise Row, Holloway. Lady Kingsbury, indeed, is right in all her details.

“Pray let me have a line, if not from yourself, at any rate dictated by you, to say how you are.

“Your affectionate son,

“HAMPSTEAD.”

It was impossible to keep the letter from Lady Kingsbury. It thus became a recognized fact by the Marquis, by the Marchioness, and by Mr. Greenwood, that Hampstead was going to marry the Quaker's daughter. As to that pretence of a refusal, it went for nothing, even with the father. Was it probable that a Quaker's daughter, the daughter of a merchant's clerk out of the City, should refuse to become a Marchioness? The sick man was obliged to express anger, having been already made to treat the report as incredible because of the disgrace which would accompany it, if true. Had he been left to himself he would have endeavoured

to think as little about it as possible. Not to quarrel with his two eldest children was the wish that was now strongest at his heart. But his wife recalled the matter to him at each of the two daily visits which she made. "What can I do?" he was driven to ask on the third morning.

"Mr. Greenwood suggests——," began his wife, not intending to irritate him, having really forgotten at the moment that no suggestion coming from Mr. Greenwood could be welcome to him.

"D—— Mr. Greenwood," he shouted, lifting himself up erect from the pillows on his sofa. The Marchioness was in truth so startled by the violence of his movement, and by the rage expressed on his haggard face, that she jumped from her chair with unexpected surprise. "I desire," said the Marquis, "that that man shall leave the house by the end of this month."

CHAPTER XXXII.

KING'S COURT, OLD BROAD STREET.

HAMPSTEAD received the letter from Lady Kingsbury, and answered it on Saturday, the 3rd of January, having at that time taken no active steps in regard to Marion Fay after the rejection of his suit on the day following Christmas. Eight days had thus elapsed, and he had done nothing. He had done nothing, though there was not an hour in the day in which he was not confirming his own resolve to do something by which he might make Marion Fay his own. He felt that he could hardly go to the girl again immediately after the expression of her resolution. At first he thought that he would write to her, and did sit down to the table for that purpose; but as he strove to produce words which might move her, he told himself that the words which he might speak would be better. Then he rode half way to Holloway, with the object of asking aid from Mrs. Roden; but he returned without completing his purpose, telling himself that any such aid, even if it could be obtained, would avail him nothing. In such a contest, if a man cannot succeed by his own doing, surely he will not do so by the assistance of any one else; and thus he was in doubt.

After having written to Lady Kingsbury and his father he reflected that, in his father's state of health, he ought to go again to Trafford Park. If it were only for a day or for an hour he ought to see his father. He

knew that he was not wanted by his stepmother. He knew also that no desire to see him had reached him from the Marquis. He was afraid that the Marquis himself did not wish to see him. It was almost impossible for him to take his sister to the house unless an especial demand for her attendance was made, and he could not very well leave her alone for any lengthened period. Nevertheless he determined to make a rapid run into Shropshire, with the intention of returning the following day, unless he found the state of his father's health so bad as to make it expedient that he should remain. He intended to hunt on the Monday and the Tuesday, travelling from London to Leighton and back. But he would leave London by the night mail train from Paddington on Wednesday evening so as to reach Trafford Park House on the following morning between four and five. It was a journey which he had often made before in the same manner, and to which the servants at Trafford were well accustomed. Even at that time in the morning he would walk to the Park from the station, which was four miles distant, leaving his luggage, if he had any, to be sent for on the following morning; but he would usually travel without luggage, having all things necessary for his use in his own room at Trafford.

It had hitherto been his custom to acquaint his sister with his manœuvres on these occasions, having never been free in his correspondence with his stepmother. He had written or telegraphed to Lady Frances, and she had quite understood that his instructions, whatever they might be, were to be obeyed. But Lady Frances was no longer a resident at Trafford Park, and he therefore telegraphed to the old butler, who had been

a servant in the family from a period previous to his own birth. This telegram he sent on the Monday, as follows;—"Shall be at Trafford Thursday morning, 4.30 A.M. Will walk over. Let Dick be up. Have room ready. Tell my father." He fixed Wednesday night for his journey, having made up his mind to devote a portion of the Wednesday morning to the business which he had on hand in reference to Marion Fay.

It was not the proper thing, he thought, to go to a girl's father for permission to ask the girl to be his wife, before the girl had herself assented; but the circumstances in this case were peculiar. It had seemed to him that Marion's only reason for rejecting him was based on disparity in their social condition,—which to his thinking was the worst reason that could be given. It might be that the reason had sprung from some absurd idea originating with the Quaker father; or it might be that the Quaker father would altogether disapprove of any such reason. At any rate he would be glad to know whether the old man was for him or against him. And with the object of ascertaining this, he determined that he would pay a visit to the office in King's Court on the Wednesday morning. He could not endure the thought of leaving London,—it might be for much more than the one day intended,—without making some effort in regard to the object which was nearest his heart.

Early in the day he walked into Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird's office, and saw Mr. Tribbledale seated on a high stool behind a huge desk, which nearly filled up the whole place. He was rather struck by the smallness and meanness of Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird's

premises, which, from a certain nobility belonging to the Quaker's appearance, he would have thought to be spacious and important. It is impossible not to connect ideas after this fashion. Pogson and Littlebird themselves carried in their own names no flavour of commercial grandeur. Had they been only known to Hampstead by their name, any small mercantile retreat at the top of the meanest alley in the City might have sufficed for them. But there was something in the demeanour of Zachary Fay which seemed to give promise of one of those palaces of trade which are now being erected in every street and lane devoted in the City to business. Nothing could be less palatial than Pogson and Littlebird's counting-house. Hampstead had entered it from a little court, which it seemed to share with one other equally unimportant tenement opposite to it, by a narrow low passage. Here he saw two doors only, through one of which he passed, as it was open, having noticed that the word "Private" was written on the other. Here he found himself face to face with Tribbledale and with a little boy who sat at Tribbledale's right hand on a stool equally high. Of these two, as far as he could see, consisted the establishment of Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird. "Could I see Mr. Fay?" asked Hampstead.

"Business?" suggested Tribbledale.

"Not exactly. That is to say, my business is private."

Then there appeared a face looking at him over a screen about five feet and a-half high, which divided off from the small apartment a much smaller apartment, having, as Hampstead now regarded it, the appearance of a cage. In this cage, small as it was, there was a desk, and there were two chairs; and here Zachary Fay

carried on the business of his life, and transacted most of those affairs appertaining to Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird which could be performed in an office. Messrs. Pogson and Littlebird themselves, though they had a room of their own, to which that door marked "Private" belonged, were generally supposed to be walking on 'Change as British merchants should do, or making purchases of whole ships' cargoes in the Docks, or discounting bills, the least of which would probably represent £ 10,000. The face which looked over the barrier of the cage at Lord Hampstead was of course that of Zachary Fay. "Lord Hampstead!" he said, with surprise.

"Oh, Mr. Fay, how do you do? I have something I want to say to you. Could you spare me five minutes?"

The Quaker opened the door of the cage and asked Lord Hampstead to walk in. Tribbledale, who had heard and recognized the name, stared hard at the young nobleman,—at his friend Crocker's noble friend, at the lord of whom it had been asserted positively that he was engaged to marry Mr. Fay's daughter. The boy, too, having heard that the visitor was a lord, stared also. Hampstead did as he was bid, but remembering that the inhabitant of the cage had at once heard what had been said in the office, felt that it would be impossible for him to carry on his conversation about Marion without other protection from the ears of the world. "It is a little private what I have to say," remarked Hampstead.

The Quaker looked towards the private room. "Old Mr. Pogson is there," whispered Tribbledale. "I heard him come in a quarter of an hour ago."

"Perhaps thou wouldst not mind walking up and down the yard," said the Quaker. Hampstead of course walked out, but on looking about him found that the court was very small for the communication which he had to make. Space would be required, so that he might not be troubled by turning when he was in the midst of his eloquence. Half-a-dozen steps would carry him the whole length of King's Court; and who could tell his love-story in a walk limited to six steps?

"Perhaps we might go out into the street?" he suggested.

"Certainly, my lord," said the Quaker. "Tribbledale, should any one call before I return, and be unable to wait for five minutes, I shall be found outside the court, not above fifty yards either to the right or to the left." Hampstead, thus limited to a course not exceeding a hundred yards in one of the most crowded thoroughfares of the City, began the execution of his difficult task.

"Mr. Fay," he said, "are you aware of what has passed between me and your daughter Marion?"

"Hardly, my lord."

"Has she told you nothing of it?"

"Yea, my lord; she has in truth told me much. She has told me no doubt all that it behoves a father to hear from a daughter in such circumstances. I live on such terms with my Marion that there are not many secrets kept by either of us from the other."

"Then you do know?"

"I know that your lordship tendered to her your hand,—honestly, nobly, and truly, as I take it."

"With perfect honesty and perfect truth most certainly."

“And I know also that she declined the honour thus offered her.”

“She did.”

“Is this you, Zachary? How are you this morning?” This came from a stout, short, red-faced man, who stopped them, standing in the middle of the pavement.

“Well, I thank thee, Mr. Gruby. At this moment I am particularly engaged. That is Jonathan Gruby,” said the Quaker to his companion as soon as the stout man had walked on; “one of the busiest men in the City. You have heard probably of Gruby and Inderwald.”

Hampstead had never heard of Gruby and Inderwald, and wished that the stout man had been minding his business at that moment. “But as to Miss Fay,” he said, endeavouring to continue to tell his love-story.

“Yes, as to Marion. I hardly do know what passed between you two, not having heard the reasons she gave thee.”

“No reasons at all;—nothing worth speaking of between persons who know anything of the world.”

“Did she tell thee that she did not love thee, my lord?—because that to my thinking would be reason enough.”

“Nothing of the kind. I don’t mean to boast, but I don’t see why she should not like me well enough.”

“Nor in sooth do I either.”

“What, Zachary; you walking about at this busy time of the day?”

“I am walking about, Sir Thomas. It is not customary with me, but I am walking about.” Then he

turned on his heel, moved almost to dudgeon by the interruption, and walked the other way. "Sir Thomas Bolster, my lord; a very busy sort of gentleman, but one who has done well in the world.—Nor in sooth do I either; but this is a matter in which a young maiden must decide for herself. I shall not bid her not to love thee, but I cannot bid her to do so."

"It isn't that, Mr. Fay. Of course I have no right to pretend to any regard from her. But as to that there has been no question."

"What did she say to thee?"

"Some trash about rank."

"Nay, my lord, it is not trash. I cannot hear thee speak so of thine own order without contradiction."

"Am I to be like a king in the old days, who was forced to marry any ugly old princess that might be found for him, even though she were odious to him? I will have nothing to do with rank on such terms. I claim the right to please myself, as do other men, and I come to you as father to the young lady to ask from you your assistance in winning her to be my wife." At this moment up came Tribbledale running from the office.

"There is Cooke there," said Tribbledale, with much emphasis in his voice, as though Cooke's was a very serious affair; "from Pollock and Austen's."

"Is not Mr. Pogson within?"

"He went out just after you. Cooke says that it's most important that he should see some one immediately."

"Tell him that he must wait yet five minutes longer," said Zachary Fay, frowning. Tribbledale, awestruck as he bethought himself how great were the affairs of

Pollock and Austen, retreated back hurriedly to the court.

"You know what I mean, Mr. Fay," continued Lord Hampstead.

"I know well what thou meanest, my lord. I think I know what thou meanest. Thou meanest to offer to my girl not only high rank and great wealth, but, which should be of infinitely more value to her, the heart and the hand of an honest man. I believe thee to be an honest man, my lord."

"In this matter, Mr. Fay, at any rate, I am."

"In all matters as I believe; and how should I, being such a one as I am, not be willing to give my girl to such a suitor as thee? And what is it now?" he shrieked in his anger, as the little boy off the high stool came rushing to him.

"Mr. Pogson has just come back, Mr. Fay, and he says that he can't find those letters from Pollock and Austen anywhere about the place. He wants them immediately, because he can't tell the prices named without seeing them."

"Lord Hampstead," said the Quaker, almost white with rage, "I must pray thee to excuse me for five minutes." Hampstead promised that he would confine himself to the same uninteresting plot of ground till the Quaker should return to him, and then reflected that there were certain reasons upon which he had not calculated against falling in love with the daughter of a City clerk.

"We will go a little further afield," said the Quaker, when he returned, "so that we may not be troubled again by those imbeciles in the court. It is little, how-

ever, that I have to say to thee further. 'Thou hast my leave.'

"I am glad of that."

"And all my sympathies. But, my lord, I suppose I had better tell the truth."

"Oh, certainly."

"My girl fears that her health may fail her."

"Her health!"

"It is that as I think. She has not said so to me openly; but I think it is that. Her mother died early,—and her brothers and her sisters. It is a sad tale, my lord."

"But need that hinder her?"

"I think not, my lord. But it must be for thee to judge. As far as I know she is as fit to become a man's wife as are other girls. Her health has not failed her. She is not robust, but she does her work in looking after my household, such as it is, well and punctually. I think that her mind is pervaded with vain terrors. Now I have told thee all, placing full confidence in thee as in an honest man. There is my house. Thou art welcome to go there if it seemeth thee good, and to deal with Marion in this matter as thy love and thy judgment may direct thee." Having said this he returned hurriedly to King's Court as though he feared that Tribbledale or the boy might again find him out.

So far Hampstead had succeeded; but he was much troubled in his mind by what he had heard as to Marion's health. Not that it occurred to him for a moment that such a marriage as he contemplated would be undesirable because his Marion might become ill. He was too thoroughly in love to entertain such an idea. Nor is it one which can find ready entrance into the

mind of a young man who sees a girl blooming with the freshness and beauty of youth. It would have seemed to him, had he thought about it at all, that Marion's health was perfect. But he was afraid of her obstinacy, and he felt that this objection might be more binding on her than that which she put forward in reference to his rank. He went back, therefore, to Hendon Hall only half-satisfied,—sometimes elated, but sometimes depressed. He would, however, go and discuss the matter with her at full length as soon as he should have returned from Shropshire. He would remain there only for one day,—though it might be necessary for him to repeat the journey almost immediately,—so that no time might be lost in using his eloquence upon Marion. After what had passed between him and the Quaker, he thought that he was almost justified in assuring himself that the girl did in truth love him.

“Give my father my kindest love,” said Lady Frances, as her brother was about to start for the train.

“Of course I will.”

“And tell him that I will start at a moment's notice whenever he may wish to see me.”

“In such case of course I should take you.”

“And be courteous to her if you can.”

“I doubt whether she will allow me. If she abuses you or insults me I must answer her.”

“I wouldn't.”

“You would be more ready than I am. One cannot but answer her because she expects to hear something said in return. I shall keep out of her way as much as possible. I shall have my breakfast brought to me in my own room to-morrow, and shall then remain with my father as much as possible. If I leave him at all I shall

get a walk. There will only be the dinner. As to one thing I have quite made up my mind. Nothing shall drive me into having any words with Mr. Greenwood;— unless, indeed, my father were to ask me to speak to him."

END OF VOL. I.

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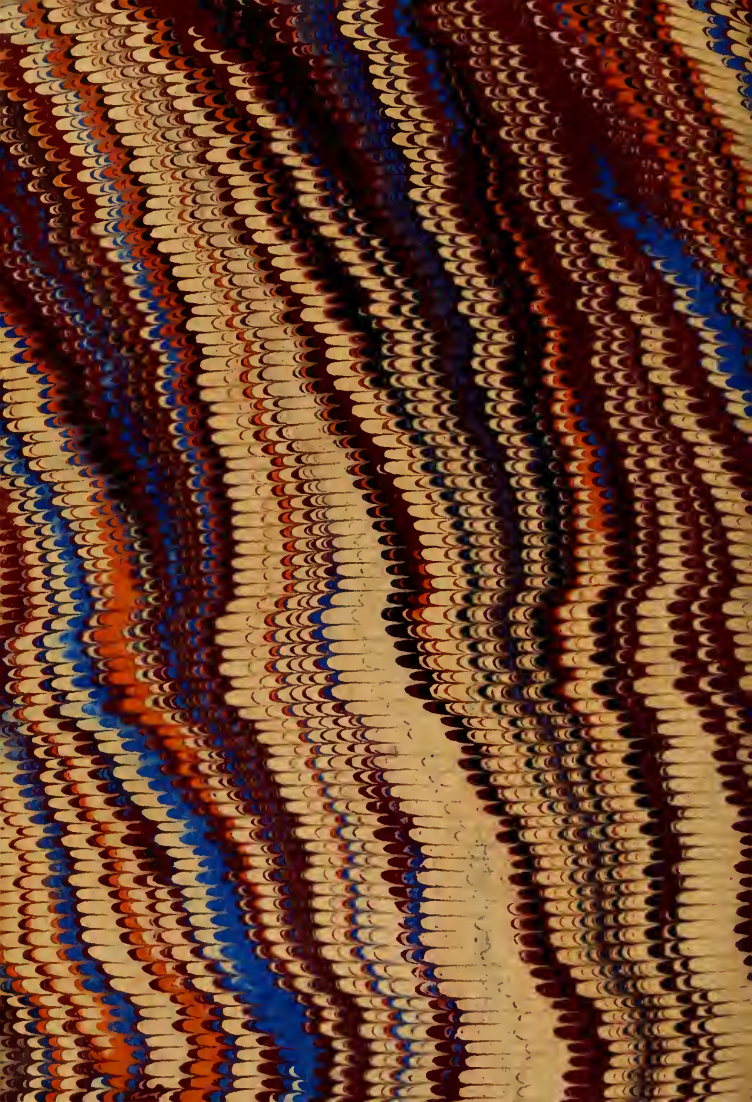
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